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# NEWHAM DEMOCRACY AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION COMMISSION **FINAL REPORT**

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## FOREWORD



When the Commission on Democracy and Civic Participation started its work in Newham in November 2019, we could never have anticipated that events taking place far away in the city of Wuhan would have such devastating consequences for the world in

2020. The first recorded cases of COVID 19 appeared in the UK at the end of January, just as we finished our schedule of public evidence hearings. By the time we came to complete the draft of this report, the UK was in lockdown.

Like the rest of London, Newham has suffered a high number of cases of the coronavirus, and tragically the virus has taken the lives of many of the borough's residents. The high rates of COVID 19 mortality amongst Newham's residents is testament to the wider social and economic inequalities - in health, housing, access to services and income - that the crisis has exposed, particularly for Black and Minority Ethnic populations. The local economy has been badly affected too, and the impact of the global recession is likely to be severe, with lasting consequences.

But like many other parts of the country, Newham has also seen a flowering of community support and mutual aid in response to the crisis. The people of Newham have come together to support their vulnerable neighbours, to deliver food and essential supplies to those in isolation, to ensure that people who have lost their jobs and incomes

have access to life's necessities, and to raise funds to support those working on the frontline in the NHS with vital equipment and daily cooked meals.

Newham's public services have also risen resolutely to the challenge too. Its health and care workers have been in the frontline of tackling the virus, while the borough's key workers have kept public services running and essential shops open. The local authority and its Mayor have led the way in protecting the public health of the people of the borough, maintaining vital facilities and services, supporting vulnerable residents, and keeping people informed and in touch with the latest public health guidelines. In doing all of this, the local authority has pioneered new ways of working with the local voluntary and community sectors.

All of this gives us hope that the capacities exist in abundance in Newham to take forward the recommendations in this report for the strengthening of democracy and civic participation in the borough. Newham is a place with strong communities and effective public leadership. It has the resources and civic commitment needed to take the borough forward as it emerges from the shadow of the pandemic. We hope our recommendations provide it with new ambition and direction in the tasks it now faces.

**Professor Nick Pearce,**  
**Chair of the Newham Democracy**  
**and Civic Participation**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Commission was established by the Mayor and Council of Newham in autumn 2019. It was given two main tasks:

- To examine both the Council's current Directly Elected Mayor system of governance (introduced to Newham in 2002) and the alternative types that exist in English local government, and to make recommendations on the best system of governance for Newham's future, and;
- To explore ways in which local residents will have opportunities to be more engaged and involved in local decision-making and the Council's work.

The Commission's evidence gathering took place between November and late February 2020. It included:

- Three day-long evidence hearings in which the Commission met in person to question a selection of experts on local democracy and methods to better involve local people;
- A survey to gather the views of Newham's councillors;
- Online evidence gathering activity, focused on a platform for local people to share their views on local democracy with the Commission, and each other;
- Two weeks of broad and deep public engagement activities in mid-January 2020, with more than 30 events organised for various groups across the borough
- Individual meetings and telephone interviews with relevant experts and interested parties.

All this evidence was carefully analysed as the Commission set about considering its recommendations. The views of local residents and councillors were particularly important in framing how the Commission approached its task.

### SECTION 2: THE MAYOR AND THE GOVERNANCE OF NEWHAM COUNCIL

Currently, the Council makes decisions under the Mayoral system of governance. It is one of three main governance options for Councils – the other two being the committee system and the leader and cabinet system.

On balance, the Commission considers that the Mayoral model remains both a democratic and effective way to govern the London Borough of Newham. The advantages of a Mayoral system are that it:

- Provides direct accountability through the ballot box for a specific individual with executive powers;
- Ensures visible democratic leadership to local residents;
- Produces an individual who, by virtue of their large electoral mandate, is able to take a robust leadership role across the place, particularly with regard to regeneration and economic development;
- Can ensure relatively stable and consistent leadership over the period of the term of office.

We recognise that vesting power in a directly elected Mayor also necessitates strong checks and balances, so that he or she is properly democratically accountable. This involves bolstering “formal” accountability at the Council – at full Council and in scrutiny committees. But the Mayor must be committed to sharing power with the other actors in a participatory democracy. In particular, decision making and the creation of public value requires the Mayor to promote and make the most of co-production with local people and partnership working with other organisations.

Our proposals and recommendations on these points form part of what we describe in our recommendations as a new Mayoral model, or “Newham Mayoral model”. Building these new ways of working into the Council's governance model is crucial. It is necessary that such arrangements clearly and accountably “dock in” to legal decision-making structures, otherwise their impact will not be felt.

This “**Newham Model**” should include:

- **A two-term limit for the executive Mayor;**
- **A standing or permanent deliberative assembly of local residents selected by sortition to initiate policy agendas for the borough and make recommendations for policy change.**
- **A more participatory system of governance that offers greater opportunities for both councillors and local residents to engage in setting agendas, shaping policy, and making decisions. This will involve more area-based working, scrutiny, and co-production. It should be bolstered by a strong local media and a central, revitalised role for elected councillors.**

In her election manifesto, the Mayor pledged to hold a referendum on the Directly Elected Mayor model before

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

the end of her third year as Mayor (ie 2021), although the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will affect this timeline. Our report sets out a number of options on how a new system of governance might be implemented.

- Option 1: submit a proposal to Government for new, prescribed governance arrangements that embed term limits for the Mayor and a standing citizens' assembly. A governance referendum would, therefore, offer local people a choice between these two Mayoral models and potentially the leader and cabinet model;
- Option 2: seek to implement the Mayoral model without submitting a proposal to Government for a legal change.
- Option 3: seek dispensation from Government to hold a governance referendum with three choices (Newham Mayoral model, conventional Mayor model, leader/cabinet), rather than two currently provided for.
- Option 4: decide against holding a governance referendum and implement the reforms proposed in this report without statutory change, recognising that changes such as term limits would not then be given statutory backing. We note, however, that this would not be consistent with the Mayor's manifesto commitment.

### SECTION 3: AREA AND NEIGHBOURHOOD GOVERNANCE

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"Area governance" describes the way in which smaller areas and localities within the borough have the power and freedom to decide things for themselves, and to spend money to resolve local issues.

Newham Borough Council carries out a large amount of work in localities and neighbourhoods, with and on behalf of local people. In working in this way, it is a step ahead of many other London boroughs, whose area or ward arrangements focus principally on the distribution of very small "pots" of cash primarily for "clean and green" activity. Our proposal for a "Newham mayoral model", in which area working is an integral part, is an opportunity to extend and deepen this existing work. In terms of structures, a range of options exist – from urban parishes (wholly independent) to beefed-up area committees or forums with spending powers. The Commission thinks that these options exist as a menu for local areas, and that the Council can assist

by setting an overall framework within which local areas might choose to draw down more powers than their neighbours. Different areas might choose to agglomerate in different ways. It allows local people to self-organise – street by street if necessary – and for the Council to support them in this activity in a way that is transparent. This will require that Newham carries out a borough-wide community governance review, as set out in Chapter 3 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, to put in place a framework within which area working can evolve and develop.

The Commission recommends that London Borough of Newham:

- Extends participatory budgeting and increases the resources allocated to areas or neighbourhoods for expenditure from the current level of £25,000. The aim should be to spend a minimum of 20% of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) resources through neighbourhood or area-based participation.
- Aligns area-based participatory decision making with the annual budget cycle.
- Carries out a borough-wide community governance review (under Chapter 3 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007), to co-produce with local people a framework and structure for how devolution and area governance will work. This community governance review could incorporate a soon-to-start evaluation of community assemblies, and would give a central role to ward councillors in engaging and working with local people to talk through what model and approach to area working makes most sense to them.
- As part of this community governance review, the Commission recommends that the council determines an area to pilot a new urban parish or 'Community Council'.

### SECTION 4: PARTICIPATORY AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

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Councils are having to think differently about the relationship they have with local people. Councils are not just service providers, emptying bins or running libraries – council tax is not like a "subscription" for these services. Councils are democratic institutions, and this demands a different approach to dialogue and participation.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In particular, there is a need to identify what people's expectations of participation, deliberation and co-production might be and to negotiate mutually agreed expectations. This could take the form of a statement on citizen participation – similar to charters which have been developed in European cities - which clearly sets out what all stakeholders will contribute, and the objectives (but also the limitations) of public participation.

Furthermore, such a statement should also set out the core principles underpinning effective participation. We think that Newham should actively pursue opportunities, as an integral part of the Newham Mayoral model, to spread accountability and responsibility for decision-making through participation and deliberation. Newham should develop a framework for citizen participation which clearly sets out what all stakeholders will contribute, and the objectives (but also the limitations) of public participation. Such a statement should also set out the core principles underpinning effective public participation.

Citizens' assemblies are one model for deliberation. Citizens' assemblies can be standing, permanent bodies or they can be established for a specific time-limited purpose. Standing bodies can look at a number of issues over time. Newham has used a citizens' assembly to help develop its policy response to the climate emergency.

Citizens' assemblies are costly to establish and run. They require a meaningful, high profile and long-term commitment to operate effectively. This does not come without risk. We have considered this carefully; given the challenges and opportunities that Newham faces, an investment in this, as part of a wider model for democratic reform, will pay back over time. This is because citizens' assemblies have the potential to engage with the necessary trade-offs involved in policy-making on complex issues. This is not about palming off difficult decisions onto local people but about using a citizens' assembly to have a meaningful, wider public debate on matters of real community concern. It is this aspect which leads us to conclude that a standing citizens' assembly has the potential to formally sit alongside other council governance systems, tempering and challenging formal power structures and developing innovative solutions.

The Commission recommends the establishment of a standing or permanent citizens' or deliberative assembly for Newham, to meet a minimum of twice a year. The citizens' assembly would respond to, and act on important, emerging local issues.





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## SECTION 5: CO-PRODUCTION AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

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Citizen co-production of public services (local people and public bodies working together to design services) and outcomes is not new. But to be effective, it needs to be integrated into the public value process which underpins public services.

Local people cited to us concerns about a lack of co-production, with the wider community being involved only once decisions have been made about what approach the Council will take. Local people in fact identified shortcomings in how the Commission itself was working – saying that the way that the Commission had been established did not demonstrate a commitment on the part of the Council to genuinely work alongside local people in making decisions.

### Regeneration

Co-production has a particular strength when it comes to regeneration and masterplanning. We think that there are particular opportunities to do more with the local community with regard to the regeneration of the Royal Docks. The regeneration plans include a comprehensive programme of cultural and community activities. The large scale and long timeframe of this project lends itself to unique and innovative approaches. Newham should challenge its partners to develop the current plans for community and cultural activities – and for the use of the Growth Fund – into something led by local people and their needs.

More needs to be done to ensure that working alongside local people happens with the right set of expectations. The Council might expect too much, too soon – local people might expect a kind of engagement that the Council may not yet be ready to provide. A better sense of mutual expectations – and mutual capacity – to work together needs to come first.

The Commission recommends that:

- Newham evaluates its existing co-production efforts, with local people themselves;
- The Council, as part of community asset mapping, understand how existing knowledge, skills and best practice can be appraised and pooled within the local authority;

- The “One Newham” partnership be seen as a primary vehicle for the Council to engage with the voluntary and community sector to better understand the infrastructure support they need. There should also be a central unit in the Council with a remit to disseminate knowledge and expertise within the authority for co-production and community engagement.

## SECTION 6: DEMOCRACY, DATA AND INNOVATION

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Newham needs a way to draw together information and data in order to use it more efficiently and democratically. This is not just about “big data”, when officials draw information into a data warehouse and use it themselves to refine and support their own work. It is about democratising what is gathered by opening it up to others, taking advantage of collective intelligence to better understand how the Council and its partners can best support local people.

The Commission recommends the creation of a Mayor's Office for Data, Discovery and Democracy – or ‘O3D’ for short – to integrate open data and data analytics, user-led policy R&D, and expertise in the tools and techniques of co-production and community participation.

Everywhere faces challenges on digital democracy – using technology to increase turnout, interest and participation in politics. With a young population, Newham should make it a priority to understand how young people in particular (as the demographic least likely to vote) engage and participate in local democracy in order to try to effect change.

Local people, and councillors, have a range of expectations on digital democracy and participation. Unsurprisingly there is a degree of caution, particularly that those less technologically able will be left behind. The Commission recommends that the Council extends its use of the “mixed reality” of online deliberation and consensus forming with more traditional engagement on a focused and specific issue of local concern, to see what works. Expertise should be sought from places where these democratic innovations have been pioneered.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## SECTION 7: LOCAL DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL INEQUALITY

Local democracy in England is marked by many of the same political inequalities that characterise Westminster democracy. Young people and those from the lowest income backgrounds are less likely to be registered to vote and to turnout at elections. Class, ethnicity and age are important determinants of political engagement and the exercise of power. At a local level, the decline of local newspapers means that scrutiny of politics is particularly weak and opportunities for shared democratic debate more limited than in the past.

There is more that the Council can do to promote accessibility within the existing system for electoral administration. Physical accessibility will always be a focus in the review of polling places but the accessibility of the virtual environment is important too. Future polling place reviews and audits of accessibility should be carried out alongside people with “protected characteristics” in the Equality Act – including disabled people – to ensure that issues which might not be obvious to an able person can be identified.

The Commission recommends the establishment of a taskforce directly to identify those who are excluded or otherwise not engaged in formal representative democracy in Newham, and to set out a targeted approach to civic education on local democracy. The Commission recommends that the Council and taskforce works with Newham Citizens, Community Links and other partners further to mobilise schools and colleges to link civic and citizen education with democratic participation – from community organising, into registration drives for young people, and improving turnout at elections. The Commission also recommends the development of local leadership development programmes, supported by organisations such as Operation Black Vote and the Local Government Association’s “Be A Councillor” programme.

The Commission also supports experimenting with on-line voting and recommends that, should national government carry out pilots for online voting in the near future, the Council should put itself forward.

A healthy democracy depends on a vibrant public sphere with a free and independent media. Yet like many other

areas in England, Newham does not benefit from a strong and well-resourced local media. We recommend that the Council extends its action in this area, helping to promote a vibrant and independent local media. It can learn from other areas in England that have mutual or co-operative local media organisations, such as the Bristol Cable.

The Commission recommends the creation of a cooperative, citizens’ media organisation in Newham, funded in a start-up phase through an endowment. This would support independent journalism and enhanced democratic debate in the borough.

## SECTION 8: THE ROLE OF LOCAL COUNCILLORS

The results of our councillor survey indicate that there are some tensions and frustrations evident in the councillor role. Councillors want to do more in two areas – on community leadership, and in decision-making at the Council corporately. More traditional “Town Hall” roles – sitting on scrutiny committees and participating in planning and licensing decision-making – are less widely attractive.

We think that an overarching narrative on councillors’ roles is necessary for the new Newham mayoral model. In particular, a role for councillors – in oversight, in setting direction, and in representing community views – needs to be designed throughout into new systems. We also think that the role of councillors needs to be explicitly front and centre in the next iteration of the Corporate Plan and in the Council’s ongoing changes to its culture and operating model. Councillors need to play a vocal part in determining what their roles – individual and collective – will be across Council business.

For councillors to exercise these roles effectively will require a commitment to training and development. The Commission recommends that councillors – using our findings as a foundation – make clear what roles they individually and collectively expect to perform in relation to:

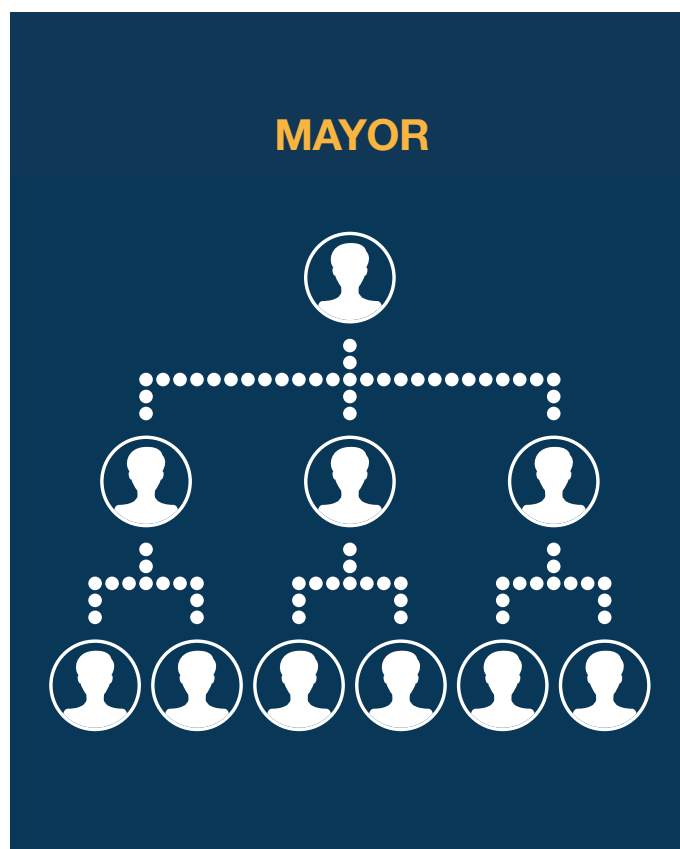
- The development of borough-wide policy at the Council and in the wider area;
- Influencing, scrutinising and challenging the Council and other partners;
- New arrangements for locality and area working.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Commission recommends a systematic approach to member development and training which engages with these roles, and with the rest of our recommendations. The Council's scrutiny function might provide the main space by which the various deliberative elements of our recommendations, and arrangements relating to co-production, might "dock in" to formal governance. This would give a clear, important, new role to scrutiny and to the councillors who sit on scrutiny committees, bolstering their activity through oversight of deliberation and co-production.

The Commission recommends that Newham's scrutiny function have a key role under the Newham Mayoral model to oversee and support new deliberative systems for policy-making, including being the conduit for recommendations and proposals arising from the new standing citizen's assembly.

The Commission recommends that Newham review its co-option scheme, to consider opportunities to draw individuals with a wider range of perspectives onto formal committees and/or scrutiny task and finish groups.



## INTRODUCTION

This is the report of the independent Newham Commission on Democracy and Civic Participation established by the Mayor and Council of Newham in autumn 2019. Our commission was given two main tasks:

- To examine both the Council's current Directly Elected Mayor system of governance (introduced to Newham in 2002) and the alternative types that exist in English local government, and to make recommendations on the best system of governance for Newham's future, and;
- To explore ways in which local residents will have opportunities to be more engaged and involved in local decision-making and the Council's work.

The Commission was asked to look at these issues for the London Borough of Newham. That local context is very important. But our work has a wider, global backdrop. In January 2020, the new [Centre on the Future of Democracy](#) at the University of Cambridge's Bennett Institute of Public Policy launched a major piece of research on global public

attitudes to democracy. The headline finding was that public dissatisfaction with democracy had grown substantially in the last quarter of the century: 2019 had the highest level of 'democratic discontent' since detailed recording began in 1995. The share of citizens across the world who expressed themselves 'dissatisfied' with democracy rose to 57.5% in 2019 – up from 47.9% in 1995. Countries such as the UK, US, Australia, Brazil and Mexico are experiencing the highest ever recorded levels of democratic dissatisfaction.

Much of this can be attributed to 'shocks' to democracies, like the global financial crisis of 2008/9, or corruption scandals. These have had the effect of undermining satisfaction with the functioning of democratic government. More widely, the findings also play into a sense of democratic malaise: the view that populists are on the rise and respect for democratic institutions and norms of democratic politics is falling. Some authors even argue that we live in a 'post-democratic' age.

# INTRODUCTION

Yet when we look around the world, we also see a counter-trend of attempts to renew democracy, particularly at the local or city level. Mayors, city governments and local authorities have been creating new forms of democratic participation and citizen engagement. Inspired by examples from the Republic of Ireland, Canada, Poland and elsewhere, a number of towns and cities have been establishing 'Citizens' Assemblies'. These are groups of citizens chosen by lot to deliberate upon an issue or set of challenges and to make recommendations for action. The idea is that if you give people the chance to reflect on all the evidence, and to discuss and debate the options for policies, they will come to a reasoned view that can command widespread support. It is commonly called 'deliberative democracy'.

Before the coronavirus crisis, we saw the spread of these types of assembly or deliberative forums across Britain. Local authorities – including Newham itself – have been holding Citizen Assemblies to make recommendations for action on the climate emergency. The Scottish Government has established one to discuss the future of Scotland, and a national Citizens' Assembly has now been set up to look at climate change by the MPs on a number of Select Committees. There are many other examples. In the UK, organisations such as the [RSA](#), [NESTA](#), [Involve](#), [DemSoc](#) and the [Centre for Public Impact](#), and academic centres such as the Constitution Unit at University College London, have excellent resources for people interested in these developments.

Citizen Assemblies and other deliberative forums are not without their critics. Some argue that they are a distraction from the real business of politics, which they believe is about the clash of values and ideas, not the pursuit of consensus. Others view them as a means of managing popular expectations, not meeting them. But whatever your view, it is undeniable that Citizen Assemblies are spreading rapidly across the world.

Another form of democratic innovation is Participatory Budgeting. This has its roots in the city of Porto Allegro in Brazil, where a new form of radical participation by the residents to debate, determine and vote on the city's budget was set up in the late 1980s. It quickly spread to other countries. Nowadays there are many forms of Participatory Budgeting used. The city of Paris is a [prominent example](#).

In places like Barcelona and Madrid, participation has

been combined with innovative uses of digital democratic platforms like [Decidem](#). These platforms give people the chance to feed in views and debate with each other on-line, as well as in face-to-face meetings. A particularly interesting use of these technologies can be found in Taiwan, where policies for contentious issues, like the regulation of Uber taxis, were developed using a platform called [vTaiwan](#). Closer to home, the Mayor of London has the on-line community, [Talk London](#) which provides a platform for Londoners to get involved in policy decisions, and the design of services and plans.

Other local authorities in England have also been pioneering new forms of community participation – such as in Wigan and Barking and Dagenham. These are often driven by the aim of building stronger cohesion between different local communities or engaging local people in running events and setting up new facilities. Citizens who organise themselves in strong community organisations are often able to build relationships across diverse groups and formulate demands to those in power. In East London, perhaps the best known example is [TELCO](#) – The East London Citizens Organisation, of which Newham Citizens is a part. This kind of community organising can help redress inequalities in power and political participation.

So the story of democracy is not all one of dissatisfaction and decline. New innovations for giving citizens greater power and voice in policymaking, and making governments more open, accountable and accessible, have been taking wing. In the Commission on Democracy and Civic Participation we have looked at what Newham might learn from them, so it can build on the changes it has introduced in recent months and take the next steps on its journey of deepening democracy.

In taking forward our work, we were asked to think about the following issues:

- How to ensure the council has decision making arrangements that are enabling, clear, co-ordinated, agile and take place at the right level?
- How to ensure transparency and accountability are in place in relation to the balance between resident and member democracy?
- How to understand and resolve the tensions and opportunities between representative and participatory democracy?
- How we improve the representative role whilst facilitating

# INTRODUCTION

and enabling wider participation?

- What the role of the councillor is in the context of communities doing more themselves?
- The most appropriate models of governance to meet the council's aspirations?

The commission was chaired by Professor Nick Pearce, Director of the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Bath, and had the following members:

- Fahmida Rahman – a Newham resident, Policy Analyst at the Resolution Foundation, and member of the WebRoots Democracy think-tank;
- Kush Kanodia – social entrepreneur and disability rights campaigner, and leader of the #NoWheelchairTax campaign, which secured the abolition to all disabled car parking charges from all 206 NHS England hospitals in 2020.
- Dr Elke Loeffler – senior lecturer at Strathclyde University in Glasgow, Director of Governance International, and provider of executive training on local governance and co-production in more than 30 countries;
- Carl Miller – Research Director of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Media at Demos, Visiting Research Fellow at King's College London, and author and news commentator;
- Kenny Imafidon – co-founder and Managing Director of ClearView Research, and previous Director of the party-neutral Bite the Ballot charity that empowers young people to register-to-vote.

To give structure to its work, the Commission took the issues it had been asked to examine and considered six key lines of enquiry:

- What should be the model of governance for the Council? What additional reforms might be needed?
- What does innovation look like in participative and deliberative democracy? What can we learn from innovative practice around the world?
- What are the most effective data infrastructures and digital platforms to enable digital democratic participation? How can we use new technologies to improve local democratic debate and engagement?

- What is the role of co-production in planning and delivering public services especially regeneration and the built environment?
- What is the relationship of local democracy to community organising and community organisations? What is the role of the local councillor in strengthening social networks and neighbourhood-level democracy?
- How can inequalities in voter registration, turnout and engagement be tackled?

## METHODOLOGY

The Commission's evidence gathering took place between November and late February 2020. It included:

- Three day-long evidence hearings in which the Commission met in person to question a selection of experts on local democracy and methods to better involve local people;
- A survey to gather the views of Newham's councillors;
- Online evidence gathering activity, focused on a platform for local people to share their views on local democracy with the Commission, and each other;
- Two weeks of broad and deep public engagement activities in mid January 2020, with more than 30 events organised for various groups across the borough
- Individual meetings and telephone interviews with relevant experts and interested parties.

All this evidence was carefully analysed as the Commission set about considering its recommendations. The views of local residents and councillors were particularly important in framing how the Commission approached its task. More detail on the way that residents in Newham, councillors and experts were engaged can be found in a report produced by the Democratic Society and other appendices to this report. In what follows, we set out our analysis and recommendations in eight sections. We make a number of key recommendations, which are summarised at the beginning of each section.





# Section

The Local and National Context



# Section 1: The Local and National Context

## 1.1 THE LOCAL CONTEXT

England is a very centralised democracy. Compared to local government in much of the rest of the world, local councils in England are highly constrained in what they can do, and the resources they can raise and spend, by central government. Nonetheless, many of the decisions that affect people's lives and livelihoods are made in the Town Hall and not Whitehall<sup>1</sup>. Local authorities organise and deliver vital services, like adult social care and children's services; own and maintain social housing; have responsibility for planning; and look after streets, parks, leisure centres and other local amenities. The decisions made by elected representatives in local government matter considerably to our everyday lives.

Newham may technically be an "outer London" borough, but it shares significant social characteristics with its inner London neighbours such as Tower Hamlets. Various aspects of Newham as a place affect the way that local democracy must operate, and how the Council's own governance systems are organised. In this section, we set out some of this context and explore what it means for the way that decisions are made in the borough, and by whom.

## DEMOGRAPHICS, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE IN NEWHAM

Newham has a large, and rapidly growing, population. Newham is the third largest borough in the capital, with a population projected to rise by 20% by 2025, and to approach half a million by 2030. It is a young borough too<sup>2</sup>. The median age in Newham is 31.9, lower than the London average of 35.3, and 38% of the population is aged 24 years or under. Newham experiences population churn typical of an inner London borough, with over a fifth of its residents having arrived or left Newham between 2017 and 2018, and like inner London boroughs, Newham benefits from significant ethnic diversity. Nearly three quarters of

the population of Newham is of black and minority ethnic heritage, compared with a London average of less than half. Within this makeup, certain ethnicities have a higher representation than the London average – particularly the Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian communities – and there is also a larger than average proportion of people of Black African origin in the population. This is reflected in residents' main languages – for around 20% of the population this is one of the South Asian languages. The proportion of the population made up of non-UK nationals is slightly above the London average.

The most recently available figures – which predate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic – suggest that Newham has a lower percentage of residents in employment, and a lower percentage of economically active residents overall, than the London average. Weekly average incomes are also lower for both sexes. Although moving in a positive direction, Newham remains one of the 10% most deprived areas in the country according to the 2019 indices of deprivation. Measures of social integration remain high, although crime and anti-social behaviour remain causes for concern, and people's sense of safety has reduced.

Despite the fact that these characteristics mean that it has a significant amount in common with its inner London counterparts, Newham is technically an "outer London" borough, which has historically made a difference to important issues like the public funding of its services. Over half of the children in Newham live in poverty – rising to two thirds when measured after housing costs – and there is significant inequality in the borough. The COVID-19 crisis will have driven up rates of poverty in Newham's families, and thousands of people in low wage employment in service sectors will have lost their jobs. The virus appears to disproportionately affect those from BAME backgrounds, posing an especially significant challenge in a diverse borough like Newham<sup>3 4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Evidence from Jonathan Carr-West (LGiU), Third Evidence Hearing, 29 January 2020

<sup>2</sup> Newham Council (2019), Corporate Plan 2019/20. <https://www.newham.gov.uk/downloads/file/591/corporateplan201920> (Accessed 5 March 2020)

<sup>3</sup> [Insert PHE BAME report when published]

<sup>4</sup> Public Health England, "Deaths involving COVID-19 by local area and socioeconomic deprivation: deaths occurring between 1 March and 17 April 2020", <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsinvolvingcovid19bylocalareasanddeprivation/deathsoccurringbetween1marchand17april> (Accessed 2 June 2020)

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The impact of the crisis will be felt for many years to come.

On the other hand, Newham is also the focus for some of the most significant regeneration plans in the country. It attracts major flows of inward investment. The ongoing regeneration of the Royal Docks is likely to be particularly transformative. Newham has significant opportunities here – the change for substantial inward investment and the creation of thousands of new homes and jobs. But it also has a challenge, in ensuring that these plans bolster existing communities, sharing the benefits from economic development amongst those suffering from poverty and deprivation, rather than sharpening inequalities still further.

The Council has an acute understanding of these challenges, and the fact that these are about more than just equalising the positive impacts of regeneration between the south and north of the borough. For the Commission, as we explain later, regeneration represents one of the most significant opportunities for positive changes to engagement and deliberation with local people – as long as it is focused and directed, and carried out in a way that will deliver real change. In order to do this, the Council will need to work closely, but in different ways, with major developers. Because we have not spoken to developers directly, and because consideration of governance in relation to economic development has formed only a small part of work, we have set out a framework for action in this area later in this report which we hope the Council and its partners can build on.

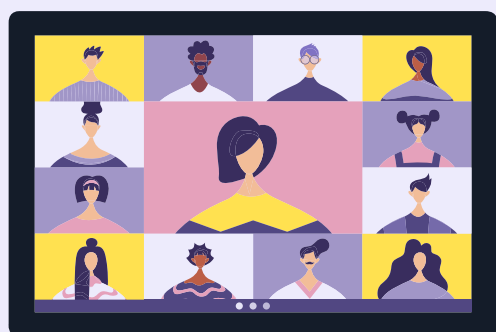
Newham's demographic figures present us, and the Council, with both challenges and opportunities. They could be seen as presenting evidence of a populace which is quite transient and hence fragmented. But what these figures do not tell us is how people from different groups and communities within the borough engage with each other, and the extent to which this varies area by area and ward by ward. The Council has the infrastructure – in the form of Neighbourhood Managers – to cultivate an unusually rich understanding of these dynamics. Our recommendations will help to accelerate this process.

Overall satisfaction with the Council amongst local people appears to be higher than regional and national averages (although methodologies for different surveys vary, so some caution is needed when comparing results): in the Newham Survey, 78% of respondents report themselves satisfied with how the Council runs things. Opinions on the performance of individual Council services are also very high. 84% of people think the Council is well-run overall – and, for context, the figure from the early 1990s was in the low 30s. This represents a huge shift in the last thirty years. There will of course be exceptions, but the presence of what seems a significant amount of goodwill on the part of local people, and an enthusiasm to be involved suggests a considerable reservoir of social capital in the borough which the Council should do everything it can to support.



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One thing that we cannot know, at the time of writing, is how the coronavirus outbreak is likely to affect the way that people work together and work with the Council in the future. The development of “mutual aid” groups, and the spread of volunteering in Newham and elsewhere in London, demonstrates significant community spirit and civic commitment. For its part, the Council has mobilised new relationships with the local voluntary and community sector through its #HelpNewham response to the crisis. The challenge will be to embed these innovations in how the Council works with local communities in the coming years, once the immediate crisis responses have passed. This shifting dynamic will affect the way that the Council seeks to act on our recommendations.



### People at the Heart of Everything We Do

#### POLITICS AND THE INTERNAL ORGANISATION OF NEWHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

The way that councils make decisions is set out in statute. Councils are required to have a constitution, a founding document or set of documents which make clear how the Council will organise itself, according to the law. The constitution adds in various further rules and procedures, at its discretion.

The usual contents of a Council constitution include:

- Rules for the operation of formal Council meetings (including terms of reference for formal bodies);
- Arrangements for decisions to be made, and delegated;
- Arrangements for access to information;
- Financial systems and procedures.

Any significant changes made to internal Council systems as part of our work will need to be integrated into the constitution. Our report, and recommendations, are written on the understanding that a review of the constitution will be necessary in order to incorporate those recommendations. All of Newham's councillors are currently from the Labour Party, although this has not always been the case. Councils made up of a single party have historically been uncommon but in London there are now a handful (Lewisham was a one-party council until recently, when one councillor resigned the Labour whip). Newham has operated under the Mayoral system since 2002.

Newham has a new operating model, agreed by Cabinet in July 2019. The focus of the operating model is “putting people at the heart of everything we do”.

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“People at the heart of everything we do” captures the essence of the policy approach of the Mayor and her administration, particularly with regards to the Council’s interactions with its residents. It appears a straightforward phrase but to operationalise this across all Council services requires fundamental cultural change in a Council that was predominantly focused on the physical capital of the borough and the externalisation of all services. It is a behavioural and attitude change that does not immediately imply changes to the way services are transacted.

So whilst some structural realignment of staffing and reporting lines may support this, the significant change will come through our new values and behaviours; the way staff relate to residents and understand that there is no “business as usual” approach for any of our services.

The structure is one element of enabling Council resources to be allocated to deliver the new priorities and the comprehensive change programme that is currently being designed following the recent culture change workshops will embrace the overall changes required.

It must be noted that there are already many examples of Newham staff putting Newham residents at the heart of everything we do and delivering exemplary service. But there are also very public occasions when that hasn’t happened and this change programme is an opportunity to not only reset the way the Council is structured and operates but also to reset the relationship with Newham residents so they can begin to trust us and know “we have their backs”.

(Extract from Cabinet report, 12 July 2019)

This different approach is being delivered through the establishment of seven new service directorates, to which new corporate priorities have been assigned in the new Corporate Plan. In March the Council agreed its new three year Mid-Term Financial Plan to operate within.

Culture change is a major component of the shift to a new operating model, in order that the Council can connect better with local people and their needs and ambitions. In this context, the Commission’s work can be seen as feeding into a wider programme of organisational change.

## Section 1: The Local and National Context

### 1.2 THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

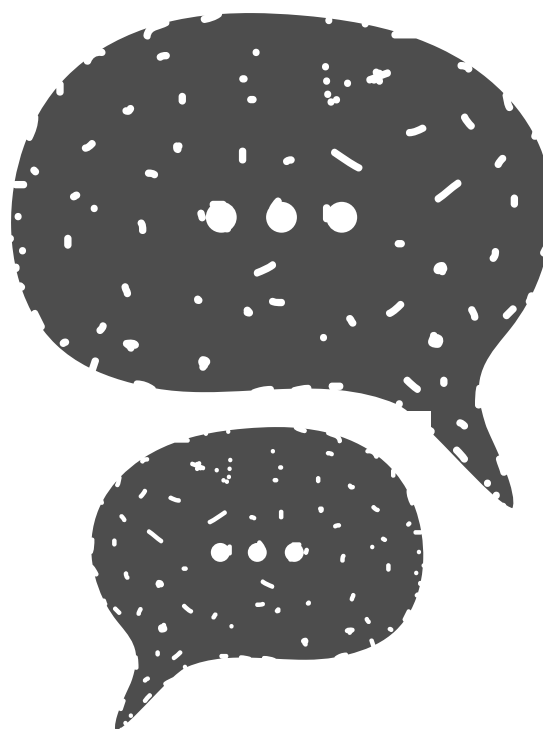
In order to make proposals that would make sense for Newham's future, we needed to understand the broader national context in which the borough finds itself. It is important to understand the general pressures under which councils operate because this understanding will influence what mechanisms and systems might be established at local level to influence and direct local decision-making. In some areas councils' freedom to act is limited, and it is important to be clear about when, and in what areas, change is possible. Often it is not at the scale or at the pace that local residents might wish.<sup>5</sup>

Funding pressures continue to be a major concern. While London Boroughs did not experience the biggest revenue cuts of all local authorities in England in the period after 2010, their budgets were generally cut by up to 40%. The more grant dependent councils experienced the largest cuts. Newham has had to make over £200 million of savings since 2010. Settlement funding assessment (which consists of the local share of business rates, and Revenue Support Grant) has fallen by £95.5m since 2013/14 and the current settlement, which only runs for 2020/21, does not cover the cost of inflation.

By the end of 19/20 spending power in local government overall had dropped by 30% compared to the pre-austerity era. This meant that local services had to be cut extensively. Even before the coronavirus crisis, further savings in Newham's budget of some £45 million were still required into the 2020s. Incentive based funding streams – like the New Homes Bonus – are available, and councils have some

flexibility over the use of their reserves, borrowing powers, and levels of Council Tax increases. But the overall picture is one of significant spending pressures, intensified by the economic shock of the COVID-19 crisis. Risks in the system around finances and resilience are increased by cuts to funding of scrutiny functions.<sup>6</sup>

But councils are taking the opportunity to innovate. Councils are adopting novel structures for service design and service delivery. Many have spun out trading companies or made large investments in special purpose vehicles, while at the same time 'insourcing' other services. Councils need a clear understanding of their financial position, led by clear, regular reporting to a finance committee and to full Council, and paying attention to the role of external auditors.<sup>7</sup> A modern form of governance has to play a central role here. Getting these fundamentals right is key to putting in place a firm and sustainable approach to governance in Newham for the future.



<sup>5</sup> Evidence from Jonathan Carr-West (LGiU), Third Evidence Hearing, 29 January 2020

<sup>6</sup> Evidence from Aileen Murphy (NAO), Third Evidence Hearing, 29 January 2020

<sup>7</sup> Ibid



A group of people are seated at round tables in a large, well-lit hall. The room has high ceilings with exposed pipes and large windows on the right side. Colorful triangular bunting is strung across the room. The people are engaged in conversation, and some are looking towards the camera. A large blue graphic element, resembling a stylized '2' or a large bracket, is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# Section

The Mayor & the Governance  
of Newham Borough Council



# The Mayor & the Governance of Newham Borough Council

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON MAYORAL SYSTEMS

The Commission has consulted with residents in Newham, the borough's councillors, and with academic experts on local government, on the merits of the Mayoral system and the main alternatives to it. It has heard arguments both for and against the Mayoral model.

On balance, the Commission considers that the Mayoral model remains both a democratic and effective way to govern London Borough of Newham. The advantages of a Mayoral system are that it:

- Provides direct accountability through the ballot box for a specific individual with executive powers;
- Ensures visible democratic leadership to local residents;
- Produces an individual who, by virtue of their large electoral mandate, is able to take a robust leadership role across the place, particularly with regard to regeneration and economic development;
- Can ensure relatively stable and consistent leadership over the period of the term of office.

We recognise that vesting power in a directly elected Mayor also necessitates strong checks and balances, so that he or she is properly democratically accountable. This cannot be achieved simply by scrutiny processes within the Council, important as these are. Since public leadership today means collaborative leadership, not 'heroic' leadership, the Mayor must be committed to sharing power with the other actors in a participatory democracy. In particular, decision making and the creation of public value requires the Mayor to promote and make the most of co-production with local people and partnership working with other organisations.

We recommend a new Mayoral model in Newham. This '**Newham Model**' should include:

- **A two-term limit for the executive Mayor;**
- **A standing or permanent deliberative assembly of local residents selected by sortition to initiate policy agendas for the borough and make recommendations for policy change.**
- **A more participatory system of governance that offers greater opportunities for both councillors and local residents to engage in setting agendas, shaping policy, and making decisions. This will involve more area-based working, scrutiny, and co-production. It should be bolstered by a strong local media and a central, revitalised role for elected councillors.**

# The Mayor & the Governance of Newham Borough Council

## 2.1 GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS: THE AVAILABLE CHOICES

Currently, the Council makes decisions under the Mayoral system of governance. This is one of the three formal governance options under the Local Government Act 2000 (a fourth, “prescribed arrangements”, allows councils to submit bespoke governance proposals to the Secretary of State for approval). It is easiest to see these options as a spectrum, presenting three broad framework into which many possible governance approaches and ways of working can fit.<sup>8</sup>

- The Mayoral system operates in a minority of local councils. In London, Lewisham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney have directly elected Mayors alongside Newham. Mayors are elected using the “supplementary vote” system and hold the power to appoint a Deputy Mayor and Cabinet made up of councillors of their choosing. Mayors can reserve a significant degree of power to themselves but may – and generally do – delegate powers to their Cabinets and others, taking decisions by majority vote.
- The Leader/Cabinet system operates in the majority of councils in London and nationwide. Here, the council elects a Leader for a term of office determined by the council itself (most councils have chosen to retain the four year term imposed by the previous “strong leader” model). Like the Mayor, the Leader holds all executive powers, which they may exercise personally or may delegate them to a Cabinet or others. The Leader appoints a Deputy Leader and Cabinet which can be all of the same party (although tends to involve other parties where a council is under no overall control).

- The Committee system operates in a minority of councils in London and England. In London, Sutton and Kingston are amongst those councils operating a “modern” committee system or a hybrid cabinet/committee system (of the latter, Wandsworth is a good example). Here, councillors are appointed to politically balanced committees which take decisions.

London therefore presents a mixed picture, with four councils using the Mayoral system, four using the committee system, and the remainder using leader/cabinet.<sup>9</sup> There is also an additional option. Councils may submit a proposal to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to adopt a form of governance not already provided for in law.<sup>10</sup> The Secretary of State has to consider such proposals against the criteria that they be “efficient, transparent and accountable”, and proposals also have to be of a nature that could be implemented in other councils. No other council has done this. Putting in place a new system would require Government to introduce secondary legislation in Parliament.

Within these broad governance options lie a spectrum of different choices. These range – at one end – from a Mayor making decisions themselves with an advisory cabinet (broadly speaking the system which Newham operated until 2018, when the Mayor delegated powers to Cabinet to make collective decisions) to a highly distributed committee system at the other. Between those two lie a large number of different options, as reflected in the diagram below<sup>11</sup>. This spectrum focuses on borough-wide governance only – it does not take account of area-based working, which we cover in more detail in section 3 below.

<sup>8</sup> More information: CfPS, “Musical chairs” (2011), CfPS/LGA, “Rethinking governance” (2014)

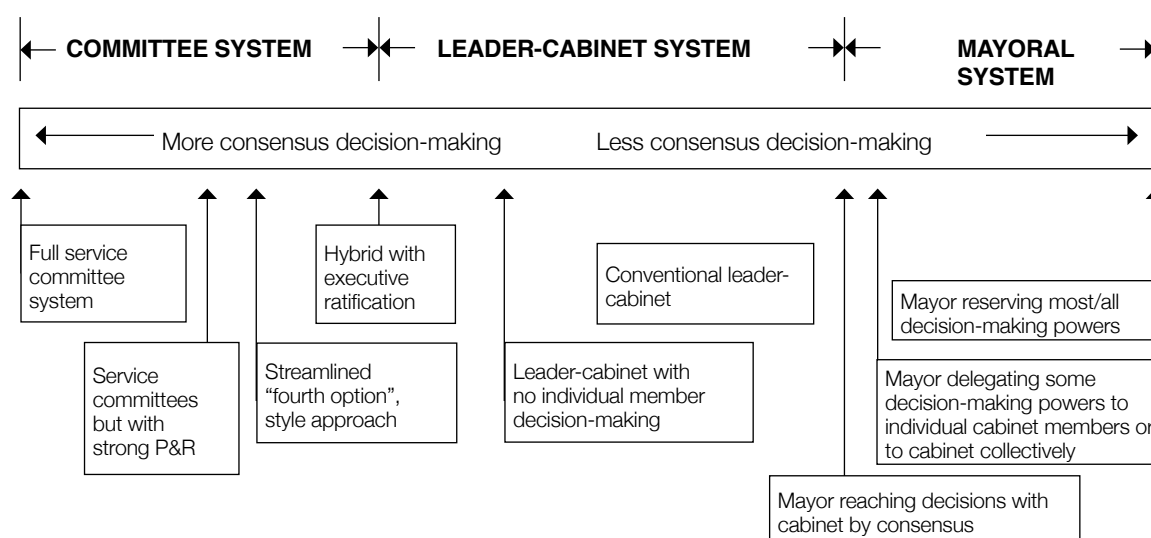
<sup>9</sup> Evidence from Kate Herbert (LGA), Third Evidence Hearing, 29 January 2020

<sup>10</sup> Local Government Act 2000, s9BA

<sup>11</sup> Reproduced from CfPS, “Musical chairs” (2011), Appendix A

# The Mayor & the Governance of Newham Borough Council

Diagram: illustrative spectrum of common approaches to governance and decision-making, set along an axis between more and less consensus decision-making. In the committee system, power is distributed between a large group of councillors, with overarching responsibility sometimes being taken by a central “policy and resources” (P&R) committee. In the Mayoral system, power is legally concentrated in the hands of the Mayor, although usually with a degree of delegation to an appointed Cabinet.



## COUNCILLOR AND COMMUNITY REVIEW ON GOVERNANCE OPTIONS

The community is interested in the Mayoral model but residents are mainly focused on the exercise of powers by the Mayor – matters which we discuss below.

As for councillors, there is a preference in favour of the current Mayoral system, or something which looks quite like it. Just under half of those who responded to our survey<sup>12</sup> wanted this. Another 20% wanted a hybrid system which might involve certain elements of a Mayoral operation. Only a small minority favoured a wholesale shift to the Leader/cabinet or committee systems. We should, however, stress that only just under half of Newham’s total number of councillors responded to this question.

Replying to our survey about the governance model and options, councillors said:

*“It depends. If there is a good Mayor the Mayoral system is quite effective. The Committee system was excellent in letting local councillors participate with in local decisions but very slow.”*

*“Good that Mayor is selected by a group wider than Councillors. However the structure doesn’t encourage the Mayor to be collegiate and work with Councillors because they are secure for four years. Not sure what the answer is.”*

There are pros and cons to all forms. I [think] the directly elected mayoral model works well if there is an opposition but as we don’t have that [...] leadership must have sufficient checks and balances to ensure we aren’t corrupt or abusing power”

We pick up a number of these issues in the next section. A sizeable number of councillors said that their views were not settled on the subject, and that there were a variety of factors which could influence the development of their views, principal amongst those the findings of the Commission, alongside understanding how other councils work.

<sup>12</sup> 12 out of the 28 councillors responding to this question either wanted to keep the Mayoral system as it stands, or to keep up with modifications.

# The Mayor & the Governance of Newham Borough Council

## 2.2 ROLES FOR MAYORS

### The Mayor as “place-shaper”

As things stand Newham’s current Mayoral model sits towards one end of the spectrum we set out above. The Mayor of Newham holds significant executive power, but delegates powers to Cabinet and others, who make decisions alongside her and with her agreement.<sup>13</sup> Some local people<sup>14</sup> and some councillors<sup>15</sup> are concerned that this gives the Mayor too much power, but for others<sup>16</sup> the system provides benefits relating to strong leadership and democratic accountability.

This is a view echoed by some expert researchers. We heard from expert witnesses that a key advantage of Mayoral systems is that they can provide effective “leadership of place” but this implies a shift towards a civic leadership model which gives space for public managerial/professional leadership, community leadership, business leadership and trade union leadership<sup>17</sup>. Where political leadership,

managerial leadership and community leadership can be convened and facilitated by a directly-elected Mayor, significant opportunities exist for innovation.<sup>18 19 20</sup> The power of “direct election” can be used to bring people and institutions together in a local area in a way that conventional leader/cabinet leadership might find challenging.<sup>21</sup>

Importantly this is not about an “all-powerful” Mayor bending everyone to their will<sup>22</sup> - it is about “convening power”. It is easier for a person to argue their case when they have been elected by tens of thousands of people than where, like a conventional local authority leader, they have been elected by 60 other councillors. Democratic legitimacy counts for a lot in partnership working. This is supported by the conclusions of the Warwick Commission on Elected Mayors and City Leadership, which found that executive mayors’ roles need to focus on identity (promotion of the place), relationships (communication, building bridges and partnerships) and information (addressing how people get to know what happens in the area)<sup>23</sup>. Our work addresses all three.

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<sup>13</sup> Other than on matters relating to planning and licensing, and other “regulatory” or “quasi-judicial” functions of the council. This Commission did not look in detail at these aspects of the council’s governance framework,

<sup>14</sup> 10 of 47 comments received in public engagement sessions expressed concern about the Mayor having “too much” power.

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix C, Councillor survey findings

<sup>16</sup> 21 of 47 comments received in public engagement sessions felt that the Mayoral system provides more democratic accountability; 5 of 47 talked about the benefits of strong leadership.

<sup>17</sup> Hambleton, R. (2019). The New Civic Leadership: Place and the co-creation of public innovation, *Public Money & Management* 39:4, 271-279

<sup>18</sup> See, for a general overview, Hambleton, R. (2017). Directly Elected Mayors: a route to progressive urban leadership? . In: D. Sweeting, ed., *Directly elected mayors in urban governance: Impact and practice*. [online] Policy Press

<sup>19</sup> Hambleton, R. (2011). Place-based Leadership in a Global Era. *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance* (Issue 8/9), <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/cjlg/article/view/2410/0> , (Accessed 10th October 2019)

<sup>20</sup> Hambleton, R. (2019). Researching directly elected mayors - key questions to address. *Public Money and Management*, Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2019.1658998> [Accessed 10 Oct. 2019]

<sup>21</sup> Rogers, B., in Gash, T. and Sims, S. eds., (2012). What can elected mayors do for our cities? [online] Institute for Government. Available at: [https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/publication\\_mayors\\_and\\_cities\\_signed\\_off.pdf](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/publication_mayors_and_cities_signed_off.pdf) [Accessed 10 Oct. 2019]. See also evidence given by Jonathan Carr-West (LGiU), Third Evidence Hearing, 29 January 2020

<sup>22</sup> Teles, F. (2013) Facilitative Mayors in Complex Environments: Why Political Will Matters, *Journal of Local Government Studies*, Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03003930.2013.801835>, [Accessed 15th October 2019]

<sup>23</sup> Warwick Commission on Elected Mayors and City Leadership (2012) [https://warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/electedmayors/summaryreport/the\\_warwick\\_commission\\_on\\_elected\\_mayors\\_and\\_city\\_leadership\\_summary\\_report.pdf](https://warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/electedmayors/summaryreport/the_warwick_commission_on_elected_mayors_and_city_leadership_summary_report.pdf) (Accessed 11 June 2020)

# The Mayor & the Governance of Newham Borough Council

The Mayoral model is not the only approach to governance which can deliver this place leadership. In local authorities like Wigan and Preston, partnership-based models of place leadership have developed under the leader/cabinet system.<sup>24</sup> But we think that, for Newham, a model which incorporates a Mayor is likely to continue to present the best approach. In part, this is due to Newham's strong focus on sustainable, inclusive economic growth. We will consider this in more detail in section 5.2 on regeneration, below.

## EXAMPLES OF MAYORAL ACTION ON INCLUSIVE GROWTH

In Bristol, both recent city Mayors have sought to promote a vision of economic growth which focuses on sustainability and inclusiveness, and participation and democratic involvement have been a big part of this agenda. The current Mayor, Marvin Rees, has led a city-wide programme of policy development and partnership working through a One City Plan. This plan is underpinned by priorities on economic activity which promote fairness and equity, offering opportunity to all and “joining up” people and communities in the interests of economic development whose benefits are more widely shared<sup>25</sup>.

In the West Midlands, Andy Street, the Combined Authority Mayor, has sought to use his convening power to foster “inclusive growth” as the central pillar of his mayoralty. To this end an Inclusive Growth Unit has been established within the combined authority to bring together partners with a focus on social change and economic inclusion. The unit carries out research and provides insight to a range of partners – ensuring that those partners can rely on consistent information and evidence to support their activity, and making alignment of priorities easier. This work has, in part, influenced the decision of the WMCA to look at the leadership arrangements for itself, and for other partners in the region – determining that there is a significant diversity gap in senior roles, and suggesting ways to address that in order to ensure that decision-making itself reflects a plurality of different perspectives from a wider range of people – thereby making it more likely that outcomes will be pursued which are more inclusive.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> More information on the Wigan Deal can be found on the council's website at <https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Council/The-Deal/index.aspx> (Accessed 3 April 2020)

<sup>25</sup> City of Bristol Corporate Strategy 2018-23, <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/33620/Bristol+City+Council+Corporate+Strategy+2018+to+2023.pdf/3e7d7377-ed1f-5d67-c6ab-af49b7159a5e> (Accessed 27 March 2020)

<sup>26</sup> Leaders like you (2019), West Midlands Combined Authority Leadership Commission, Final Report, [https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/2218/leadership-diversity-in-the-west-midlands\\_-002.pdf](https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/2218/leadership-diversity-in-the-west-midlands_-002.pdf) (Accessed 27 March 2020)

# The Mayor & the Governance of Newham Borough Council

## THE MAYOR AS “DIRECTLY-ACCOUNTABLE REPRESENTATIVE”

The visibility of Mayors’ means that they can be held “accountable” through public debate and discourse, and the fact of their election of course means that they can lose their posts. The direct accountability of Mayors – in particular deriving from direct election - was something thought to be important by members of the public to whom we spoke, and was a feature in favour of the Mayoral model for the experts who gave evidence to us.<sup>27</sup> Some members of the public felt that the Mayoral model gives one person too much power, and provides too much opportunity for patronage and the misuse of power. This problem was seen by some local people as being particularly acute given the fact that all elected positions in Newham are held by one political party. The exercise of place leadership by a vocal and visible Mayor presents challenges for accountability – for the place as well as for the individual in that position. Responsibility for decision-making – individually and collectively – needs to be understood and assertive. A visible Mayor will be held to account, and expected to be answerable, for a range of issues in the local area, including many not under his or her direct control. These spaces for tension may be the same as the spaces for innovation which we talked about in the section above on “place leadership.”

Between elections, systems to hold Mayors to account are largely based on the role of the full Council, for example, in approving the Council budget, and overview and scrutiny functions performed by committees. Local authorities are required by law to have overview and scrutiny committees, which have certain statutory powers (we discuss the role of scrutiny in more detail in section 8.3, below). But beyond this, accountability is largely political and community-based (with activism, and a vibrant local press, being seen as a principal means to hold a Mayor to account).

There are a number of possible reforms which could serve to increase the accountability of the Mayor, on which we took evidence. They include:

- *Recall.* There is no provision in legislation for a directly elected Mayor to be “recalled”<sup>28</sup>, although such a provision exists in respect of MPs, and elected Mayors in other jurisdictions. In Parliament, recall of MPs is provided for the Recall of MPs Act 2015. Here, a recall can only be triggered by the Speaker in the aftermath of a serious personal conduct matter – either a criminal conviction of sufficient seriousness or a serious personal conduct issue for which a suspension has been imposed. If these conditions are satisfied the local returning officer is instructed to open a local petition for the removal of the MP. 10% of eligible voters in the area must sign for the petition to have force in removing the MP in question. If the petition is successful a vacancy is created and a by election held. There is nothing preventing the recalled MP standing for election. Because of its limited use evidence on the potential of recall is sparse. In England, a sitting Mayor has only been removed from power once – Lutfur Rahman in Tower Hamlets. This removal was due to the finding of an election court that his election had been flawed. In other respects, the only circumstances in which a Mayor could practically be removed from office would be where they have acted in a certain way with regard to recognised pecuniary interests; something for which a fine can be levied and for which an individual can be barred from public office. For wider breaches of a Council’s Code of Conduct (behaviour breaches, for example) there is no sanction that might remove a Mayor. This said, recall is something that would only be of real value in extremis. In the long term, steps formally to remove a sitting Mayor in this way might be taken forward at national level – for now, we do not think that should form a part of Newham’s plans.

<sup>27</sup> Evidence from Robin Hambleton (UWE), Ben Rogers (Centre for London), Third Evidence Hearing, 29 January 2020

<sup>28</sup> Some academics have highlighted this as a specific criticism of the Mayoral model – see Jones, G (2015) The case against directly elected executive Mayors: Blogpost, Political Studies Association, <https://www.psa.ac.uk/insight-plus/blog/case-against-directly-elected-executive-mayors> (Accessed 19 February 2020)



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- *Term limits.* In many other countries, mayors or governors are subject to term limits but there is no provision in legislation for local authorities to impose such limits in the UK. An argument against term limits is that they might prohibit a person most qualified for a position (the incumbent) from contesting it; other arguments against term limits have been frequently argued in other jurisdictions.<sup>29</sup> But term limits are used widely around the world and research has shown that in some jurisdictions, term limits have had positive effects on voter turnout, voter choice and diversity of candidates.<sup>30</sup> It might be possible to introduce term limits “informally”, by securing the commitment of political parties and Mayoral candidates that they will voluntarily limit their candidacy in future elections. But for obvious reasons, this is not an ideal solution.

## 2.3 THE MAYOR AS “FIRST CITIZEN OF THE BOROUGH”

Feedback from local people suggested that there was some concern about the way that the executive Mayor carries out ceremonial functions. Some members of the public say the combination of political leadership and ceremonial functions in one person as a profile-raising opportunity for the Mayor. Some members of the public, and a couple of councillors, raised concerns about the amount of “pomp and ceremony” surrounding the executive Mayor and how much he or she is seen “opening things”, rather than delivering. The high profile and visibility of the Mayor is important for accountability, and can give people the assurance that the person they have elected is actively working on their behalf. But this high profile can clearly be double edged.

In places that operate under the Leader/Cabinet or

committee system, the Leader is usually seen as exercising political leadership, while the ceremonial Mayor is the “first citizen” of the area, carrying out ceremonial functions and chairing meetings of Council. Some of this confusion rests on the use of the title “Mayor” for two roles which are in reality quite distinct. In Newham, the Chair of Council is a distinct but limited role.

We think that work can be done to split the ceremonial and executive roles of the Mayor. In some Mayoral authorities, like Hackney, the Chair of Council is styled as the “Speaker”, and conducts some ceremonial duties alongside their formal role chairing those meetings. This could be one way of avoiding the risk of confusion in having two people carrying out Mayoral-related functions. While we think that action is needed to move some more ceremonial duties away from the executive Mayor, exactly how this demarcation might look in practice is something which will need to be for the Mayor and Council to determine.

## 2.4 THE MAYOR’S RELATIONSHIP WITH FULL COUNCIL

### Local choice functions

Full Council is traditionally the primary decision-making body of a local authority. Since 2000, all the powers of local authorities vest directly in a Mayor or Leader and Cabinet (known collectively as executive arrangements), unless they have been expressly reserved in statute as being powers exercised by Full Council (known as non-executive powers). Councils can determine whether certain powers are discharged by the Mayor or Leader, or by the Council. These are known as “local choice” functions<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> The fairness of otherwise of term limits has been a live issue in relation to elections to the US Congress for some time – see Burgat, C. (2018). Five reasons to oppose Congressional term limits (Brookings Institute), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2018/01/18/five-reasons-to-oppose-congressional-term-limits/> (Accessed 10 April 2020).

<sup>30</sup> Kuhlmann and Lewis (2017). Legislative term limits and voter turnout, *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, 17(4) pp 372-392.

<sup>31</sup> A list of local choice functions (and how they are allocated) can be found in Newham’s Scheme of Delegation (effective 1 November 2018): <https://www.newham.gov.uk/downloads/file/437/newhamschemeofdelegation>.

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A number of these functions are regulatory in nature. For example, some relate to the identification and abatement of statutory nuisances, to the use of land and to certain matters relating to education provision. These powers are not in themselves significant or substantial, but part of a move to a new Mayoral model with a more distributed form of power would involve a review of these functions, to consider whether more could fall under the oversight of full Council. The demarcation between executive and non-executive powers is currently set out in the Council's Constitution and Scheme of Delegation, which we consider should be reviewed with this in mind.

## OPENING UP COUNCIL AS A CRUCIBLE OF LOCAL DEBATE

In many councils, full Council meetings can be performative affairs. In Newham's case, making the full Council meeting meaningful is particularly challenging, given that all councillors are from a single party. Few members of the public to whom we spoke had any insight into the business of full Council – it came up very little in discussions. We did not ask councillors specifically about full Council in our survey but many did say that they would appreciate more opportunity for open debate and dialogue in the decision-making process.

Council is a high-profile place. It provides an opportunity for all councillors to come together, to discuss matters of community concern and agree on ways forward. It is in its ideal form deliberative, like some of the public-facing deliberative measures we talk about later in this report. We think that changes can be made to enhance this, and to encourage frank, meaningful and candid debate between councillors which engages local people. Of course, we understand and recognise the political challenges of this approach.

Bringing public views more effectively into the business of Council might provide the spark for a more dynamic approach. Initially, there may be two ways to do this:

- Enhanced opportunity for public questions. In Kensington and Chelsea, part of the response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and the need for additional public scrutiny that followed it, was an independently-facilitated public questioning slot at full Council meetings. We think that Newham could trial something similar;
- An annual "People's Council" meeting. Local people could set the agenda of a full Council meeting which would more actively engage them in councillors' conversations. This could be a process owned by the standing citizen's assembly, whose establishment we recommend in the next section.

## RECENT INNOVATIONS IN PRACTICE AT FULL COUNCIL

### ***Increased frequency of Council meetings***

A key manifesto pledge of the Mayor was to increase the number of Full Council Meetings. This has been achieved since the change of administration, with an increase to ten council meetings per year, including one annual Council meeting, two themed meetings, and seven ordinary meetings. This means that Newham has more full Council meetings than the London average (which runs at between six and eight).

### ***Public Question Times***

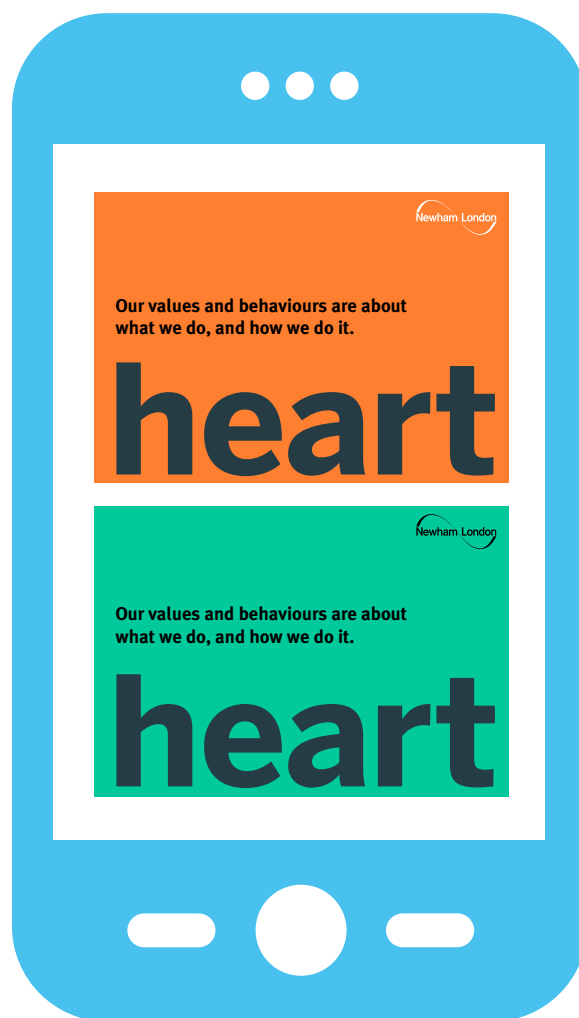
Public Question Time is now a scheduled item for each Council meeting. Residents can submit two questions per meeting, on any given subject. The deadline for questions is 6 clear working days before the actual date. The answer is provided in the order papers at the Council meeting, and emailed to the resident after the meeting. There is no current provision for a supplementary question/s on the night of the actual meeting.

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## 2.5 THE MAYOR, GOOD GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY

Overall, local people and others to whom we spoke appeared less concerned about the overall structure and model for governance, and more about the culture and attitudes of the people operating within the system.<sup>32</sup> We heard from expert witnesses<sup>33</sup> that often frustrations with a particular governance model end with the change of structure rather than addressing these wider cultural issues. This is a view backed up by research carried out by the Centre for Public Scrutiny<sup>34</sup>, and by other councils' democracy and governance reviews, notably Kirklees<sup>35</sup>, Cornwall<sup>36</sup> and the recent review in Croydon<sup>37</sup>. As such, our solutions focus on the need to understand and address attitudes, behaviours and values within the organisation and the wider area.

This is backed up by the experience of different kinds of "Mayoral models" in place across England, as well as internationally. Combined Authorities in England have elected Mayors held to account by a Board comprised of local authority leaders. Even within the local government model, Mayors work in dramatically different ways, driven by their personalities and by the personalities of those with whom they work. As such there are a significant range of different perspectives on what "civic leadership" mean – in Bristol, developments since it was the only one of ten councils to vote in favour of an executive Mayor in 2011 highlight the personal nature of this kind of executive authority<sup>38</sup>.



<sup>32</sup> Evidence from Kate Herbert (LGA) and Jonathan Carr-West (LGiU), Third Evidence Hearing, 29 January 2020

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Hammond E. (2012) Musical chairs. Centre for Public Scrutiny. Cox, R and Hammond, E (2014) Rethinking governance. Centre for Public Scrutiny/Local Government Association.

<sup>35</sup> The final report of the Kirklees Democracy Commission (2018) can be found at <http://www.democracycommission.org.uk/> (Accessed 3 April 2020). The review was led by an external commission.

<sup>36</sup> The final report of the Review of Governance at Cornwall Council (2016) can be found at <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/councillors-and-democracy/governance-how-council-decisions-are-made/2016-governance-review-of-cornwall-council/> (Accessed 3 April 2020). The review involved councillors, assisted by an External Group of experts.

<sup>37</sup> The final report of the Croydon Governance Review (2020) can be found at <https://www.croydon.gov.uk/democracy/dande/governance-review>. The review was led by councillors.

<sup>38</sup> Hambleton, R. and Sweeting, D. (2014). Innovation in urban political leadership. Reflections on the introduction of a directly-elected mayor in Bristol, UK. [online] Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09540962.2014.945793>, [Accessed 10th October 2019]

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## EXAMPLES OF EXECUTIVE MAYORS IN ENGLAND

In Bristol, the position of Mayor was established following a referendum in 2011. Referendums were held in 10 “core” English cities, Bristol being the only one where a majority voted in favour of the introduction of the Mayoral model.

The first candidate elected as Mayor was an independent, George Ferguson, who deliberately marked himself out as intending to act consensually and independently<sup>39</sup>. The Mayor sought to establish a “rainbow cabinet” of different political parties to deliver his priorities. He managed to overcome scepticism and suspicion from many more established politicians, but the impacts of his mayoralty on civic leadership and democracy may have been marginal (although recognising the general increase in visibility in the leadership role, already discussed)<sup>40</sup>. With a commitment to be “non-political” came a struggle to achieve change, given the limited levers at his disposal. Some promising and ambitious aims – around co-production and deliberation in particular – ended up fizzling out<sup>41</sup>.

The new Mayor, Marvin Rees, picked up on many of the themes of his predecessor. He recognised the potential of the mayoralty to “convene” partners and pursued a policy called “One City”<sup>42</sup> to do this. He has used the Mayorality to bring together public and private sector partners in Bristol around a common plan of action. Robin Hambleton’s recent research has used the term “new civic leadership” (NCL) to describe these practices (as discussed above).

In Liverpool, the Council decided in 2012 to adopt the Mayoral model for decision-making. The Mayor since has been the former Council leader, Joe Anderson. As in other areas, despite this, the role of the Mayor has decisively shifted into the space of broader civic representation, rather than just “city management” on behalf of the Council alone<sup>43</sup>.

Since 2017 Liverpool has also had a city region Mayor, Steve Rotherham. There has been a degree of tension between the incumbents of the roles and disagreement over the demarcation of responsibility. Opponents of the Mayoral model have used this as justification for attempts to consult on the abolition of the role. A motion for a consultation on a change was tabled by the opposition at Liverpool’s full Council in September 2019. This motion was defeated, but a Labour motion does now commit the Council to such a consultation after the next local election.

<sup>39</sup> Sweeting, D., Hambleton, R (2019) The Dynamics of depoliticisation in Urban governance: Introducing a directly elected Mayor, Journal of Urban Studies, Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098019827506> , [Accessed 10 Oct. 2019]

<sup>40</sup> Hambleton and Sweeting, (2016) Developing a leadership advantage? An assessment of the impact of mayoral governance in Bristol, Available at: <https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/919426> , [Accessed 13th October 2019]

<sup>41</sup> Oliver, T (2017). Can the directly elected mayor model deliver? Innovation, Limitation and adaptation: lessons from the City of Bristol. In: D. Sweeting, ed., Directly elected mayors in urban governance: Impact and practice. [online] Policy Press. Available at: <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=FhgwDwAAQBAJ&dq=Headlam+%26+Hepburn,+2017&lr=> [Accessed 15th October 2019]

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.bristolonecity.com/about-the-one-city-plan/>

<sup>43</sup> Headlam, N., Hepburn, P. (2017) What a difference a Mayor makes. A case study of the Liverpool Mayoral model, Journal of Local Government Studies. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2017.1333429> (Accessed 10th October 2019)

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## 2.6 A UNIQUE AND DISTINCTIVE MAYORAL MODEL FOR NEWHAM

There is, then, no single Mayoral model – and no single approach. A significant amount of flexibility exists for councils which want to innovate. Much depends on context. How can we reduce the potential weaknesses of the existing Mayoral model while keeping the benefits in Newham? We have looked at a number of mechanisms to do this.

- **Moving powers formally out of the hands of the Mayor.** Certain powers might move to be exercised by:

- o **Full Council.** “Local choice” functions might be reviewed to see if the Council can choose to move more of these to being the Council’s responsibility, rather than the Mayor’s;
- o **Area bodies.** Drawing power down to local communities presents a key opportunity to spread responsibility and accountability within the framework of a Mayoral model. We make recommendations on area working in section 3 below;
- o **More participation and deliberation in decision-making.** There are a range of opportunities to introduce more participation, co-production and deliberative democracy in Newham, with the Council working alongside local people on certain key issues to develop solutions and actions through resident engagement. We make recommendations on these issues in sections 4 and 5 below;

- **More technical safeguards on Mayoral powers.** There are a few technical changes to the governance system – principally, the introduction of term limits and a power of recall – which would help to provide strong checks and balances. We explore and make recommendations on these in section 2;
- **A central role for empowered councillors.** The Council’s scrutiny function is one way for councillors to exert influence on decision-making – but they have other roles too. We make recommendations on the key roles that councillors need to play in the final section of this report,
- **Better use and deployment of information to support a more informed population with greater civic awareness.** We make recommendations on this in sections 6 and 7.
- **Support to a more vibrant local press.** The fragmentation and reduced reach of the local media is a real concern for us. We think that a strong, independent and effective local press is a key component of local democracy. We make recommendations on this in section 7.3.

Our proposals and recommendations on these points form part of what we describe in our recommendations as a new Mayoral model, or “Newham Mayoral model”. Building these new ways of working into the Council’s governance model is crucial. It is necessary that such arrangements clearly and accountably “dock in” to legal decision-making structures, otherwise their impact will not be felt. We discuss and make further recommendations on this in later sections of this report.

**The Commission recommends that Newham adopts a new model of governance – one which expands democratic participation in the borough and subjects the existing Mayoral system to increased accountability, checks and balances.**

**The Commission recommends that as a minimum the “Newham Mayoral model” incorporates:**

- **A two-term limit for the executive Mayor;**
- **A standing or permanent deliberative assembly of local residents selected by sortition to initiate policy agendas for the borough and make recommendations for policy change.**



# The Mayor & the Governance of Newham Borough Council

- **A strengthened role for the Council’s scrutiny function<sup>44</sup>, making increased use of co-option to task and finish groups in order to draw an understanding of “lived experience” into Council business;**
- **An annual “People’s Council”, replacing an existing full Council meeting, providing an opportunity for the Mayor to set out her “state of the borough” and an opportunity for local people to hold her to account directly; and at other meetings of full Council, expanded opportunity for public questions.**

In addition, the Commission recommends that:

- The Council review its “local choice” functions, to consider whether certain functions and activities could be placed in the hands of full Council;
- Establish a clearer role for a Council “Speaker”, an enhancement of the Council Chair role which currently exists to perform ceremonial functions currently carried out by the executive Mayor. This would of course not preclude the executive Mayor from a presence and involvement in the civic life of the borough, the demarcation of the roles being something that would need to be subject to further dialogue and agreement.

The Commission recommends that the “Newham Mayoral model” is developed so as to provide for the integration of improvements to area governance, and wider deliberation and participation measures as set out elsewhere in this report.

## LEGAL ISSUES

One of the issues we have examined is whether some of the changes that we are recommending would require a change in legislation. We noted above that the Secretary of State can review proposals for novel forms of governance. Would this be necessary in this case?

Our conclusion is that this would depend on the nature and level of the safeguards that are considered appropriate. We

think that a change in legislation could have value in formally embedding several of the matters on which we will make recommendations below. These are:

- Term limits. An informal, political commitment from candidates to only stand for re-election once survives for only so long as candidates and political parties are prepared to make this commitment, and stick to it. Writing this into law might assist;
- Recall. Any form of effective recall provision would definitely need a change in legislation. A council could seek to write provisions around into its constitution. For example, local people could be empowered by a council constitution to submit a “petition” expressing a lack of confidence in a Mayor which could be used to exert significant political and community pressure on that Mayor to resign. But without legal backing, such a change would be unenforceable, and this is one of the reasons why on balance we do not feel that such a power should be pursued in the short term;
- Formal area working. Other than parish councils (which we discuss in section 3.3 below) the other possible approaches for area and neighbourhood working which we lay out might be seen as requiring protection. But the nature of the framework that we suggest for such area working may work against formal, legal structures like this;
- Introduction of deliberative systems. In particular, our recommendation below for a standing citizen’s assembly could be seen to benefit from being a formal part of the Council’s governance framework, protected by law. Recent experience in Madrid might be seen as supporting the need for such protection.<sup>45</sup>

If the Council were to consider it necessary, in order to embed some of the elements of the “Newham model” in a way that provides additional assurance and accountability, to submit a proposal to Government to create a new governance system, this would affect the conduct of a governance referendum.

<sup>44</sup> We consider the role of scrutiny and the wider role of elected councillors in section 8

<sup>45</sup> El Diario (2 October 2019), “Almeida ends citizen participation experiment” (in Spanish) [https://www.eldiario.es/madrid/Gobierno-Almeida-ciudadanos-fiscalizan-Ayuntamiento\\_0\\_948405657.html](https://www.eldiario.es/madrid/Gobierno-Almeida-ciudadanos-fiscalizan-Ayuntamiento_0_948405657.html)



# The Mayor & the Governance of Newham Borough Council

## THE GOVERNANCE REFERENDUM

In her election manifesto, the Mayor pledged to hold a referendum on the Directly Elected Mayor model before the end of her third year as Mayor (ie 2021), although the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will affect this timeline. Governance referendums are heavily circumscribed by law.

- The wording for governance referendums is set out in legislation and the Council and campaigners cannot change it. The Council is under an obligation to publish alongside notice of the referendum a summary of the changes that the referendum will bring about.
- A Council is bound to implement the result of a governance referendum. This involves the changes coming into place from the \*next\* municipal year after the year of the referendum – so a referendum in 2021, subject to the outcome of the referendum, would lead to governance change in 2022;
- Governance arrangements changed by referendum may not be changed for 10 years after the date of that referendum, and then only by means of a further referendum.

Governance referendums can be held by a resolution of full Council – as will presumably be the case in this instance. Referendums can also be brought about through petition: 5% of the electorate in a given local authority area must sign a petition for a governance referendum over the course of a given year; if this threshold is met a referendum must be held irrespective of the Council's views. This has occurred in two areas of England although petitions have been attempted elsewhere as well.<sup>46</sup> A referendum can be triggered in this way to move between any of the governance options. Given this statutory position, we consider that the Council has four options, assuming that it wishes to adopt our substantive proposals for a new Newham mayoral model of governance.

- **Option 1:** submit a proposal to Government for new, prescribed governance arrangements that embed term limits for the Mayor and a standing citizens' assembly. If approved, this proposal would form the basis for a new "Newham Mayoral model", as opposed to the current

"generic Mayoral model". A governance referendum would, therefore, offer local people a choice between these two Mayoral models and potentially the leader and cabinet model;

- **Option 2:** seek to implement the Mayoral model without submitting a proposal to Government for a legal change. This would mean that a governance referendum would be held between the Mayoral model (which would be the new Newham Mayoral model) and one of the other two governance options. We assume for the sake of our report that the alternative would be the leader-cabinet model, as the dominant governance option across London and England. Crucially, in such a referendum the Council would be obliged to describe the Newham Mayoral model we propose as "the system that the Council operates now". This would not be the practical situation, given that we propose important reforms, and therefore would present challenges for properly informed democratic debate in the referendum.
- **Option 3:** seek dispensation from Government to hold a governance referendum with three choices (Newham Mayoral model, conventional Mayor model, leader/cabinet), rather than two currently provided for.
- **Option 4:** decide against holding a governance referendum and implement the reforms proposed in this report without statutory change, recognising that changes such as term limits would not then be given statutory backing. We note, however, that this would not be consistent with the Mayor's manifesto commitment.

Our proposals account for a substantive, meaningful shift in power from the Mayor to local residents and councillors, within the existing legal governance framework. While we consider the Newham Mayoral Model to be the optimum final outcome, the approach that the Council uses to reach that point – and ratify any decision – will be for it to determine. We would note, however, that the ten year limit on future governance change (which would apply if formal governance change followed a referendum) can be seen as a further constraint on the Council's freedom to act. It will be necessary for the Council to consider the community response to our proposals before committing to any particular action.

<sup>46</sup> Fylde (in 2014) and Sheffield (whose referendum was originally due to be held in May 2020, now postponed until 2021)



# Section 3

Area & Neighbourhood  
Governance

# Area & Neighbourhood Governance

## AREA AND NEIGHBOURHOOD GOVERNANCE: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Local authorities in England and Wales are large by international standards and representative local democracy can therefore appear remote from citizens. Area or neighbourhood based governance offers the opportunity to expand public participation in decision-making and bring local authorities closer to their residents. **The Commission recommends that London Borough of Newham:**

- **Extends participatory budgeting** and increases the resources allocated to areas or neighbourhoods for expenditure from the current level of £25,000. **The aim should be to spend a minimum of 20% of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) resources through neighbourhood or area-based participation.**
- **Aligns area-based participatory decision making with the annual budget cycle.**
- **Carries out a borough-wide community governance review (under Chapter 3 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007)<sup>47</sup>, to co-produce with local people a framework and structure for how devolution and area governance will work.** This community governance review could incorporate a soon-to-start evaluation of community assemblies, and would give a central role to ward councillors in engaging and working with local people to talk through what model and approach to area working makes most sense to them.
- **As part of this community governance review, the Commission recommends that the Council determines an area to pilot a new urban parish or 'Community Council'.**

### 3.1 WHAT WE UNDERSTAND BY "AREA GOVERNANCE"

"Area governance" describes the way in which smaller areas and localities within the borough have the power and freedom to decide things for themselves, and to spend money to resolve local issues.

Newham Borough Council carries out a large amount of work in localities and neighbourhoods, with and on behalf of local people. In working in this way, it is a step ahead of many other London boroughs, whose area or ward arrangements focus principally on the distribution of very small "pots" of cash primarily for "clean and green" activity.

Despite its ambition and a degree of success, the work undertaken by different parts of the Council in local areas often happens in a way that is poorly aligned, and residents sometimes do not know or understand how things are consulted on, and how they have a say in the life of their neighbourhood or the wider borough.<sup>48</sup> Where it happens, attempts to engage with local people feel episodic – occurring in fits and starts – rather than ongoing.

<sup>47</sup> Statutory guidance, issued under s100 of the 2007 Act and published in 2010, remains in force: MHCLG (2010), "Guidance on community governance reviews", [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/8312/1527635.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/8312/1527635.pdf) (Accessed 2 June 2020)

<sup>48</sup> Appendix A, Public Engagement Findings

## Area & Neighbourhood Governance

Having consistent structures and systems for community conversation, and community decision-making, moves power away from the Town Hall and into the hands of local people.

Our proposal for a “Newham mayoral model”, in which area working is an integral part, is an opportunity to extend and deepen this existing work, and to integrate some of Newham’s existing practices into a more coherent and consistent framework or structure. Compared to other London boroughs, Newham performs well – but compared to the best international examples, Newham is still working at the margins.

This collective action should not require the approval of the Council to happen. Local people come together on streets, on estates and in neighbourhood. They form clubs and associations, residents’ groups and tenants’ bodies to act in their interests. Local people are best placed to understand what solutions will work best for their own communities. The Council’s job is to understand these aspirations and to do what it can to support local people.

The local people that we spoke to had a particular sense of the kinds of issues that they wanted to have a stake and say in. These were:

- Public spaces;
- Youth services;
- Community safety;
- Housing and homelessness;
- Environment and climate change;
- Planning and regeneration;
- Traffic and parking;
- Local businesses.

There are two important points to be made about this list:

- Not all people in every area will necessarily expect the same kind of stake or input into policy or services in relation to all of these issues;
- The Council is still likely to want and need to set overarching policy on many of these issues – in the interests of equality, the wider Newham community and to fulfil its democratic mandate.

Local people felt that engagement between the Council

and local people on issues of importance is made more important by the lack of political opposition on the Council.

### 3.2 COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE AREA WORKING

Success, for any local scheme for area-based governance, seems to depend on:

- **Clarity of powers, responsibilities, duties and accountability:** Everyone must understand a new local governance system, what it is there to accomplish and where its accountabilities lie.
- **Local leadership:** What happens must be driven by local people and their needs, rather than professionals or others. There is a clear role for local elected councillors to play, although they should not necessarily lead the process. This reflects what councillors told us in our survey about the stronger role they would like to play in their local communities.
- **Sustainability:** What is put in place must be able to be supported locally in the long term, in terms of the time and capacity of people in the local community.
- **Funding:** Ensuring that finances are in place to deliver the duties and responsibilities. Importantly, a clear role for locally elected councillors is critical for all of the above.

#### Clarity of powers

Local people, and the principal council, need to know and understand what powers are available to local areas; this can only be resolved through conversation.

This involves answering questions like:

- On what issues can power be held at a local level?
- What is the geographical area to which those powers apply?
- Who holds powers on what issues, at what level?
- How do we work together to carry out our work – and how do we deal with disagreement?

On the first point, there will be certain matters where Newham is likely to want to hold power exclusively at the borough level, with little to no devolution of power. Strategy around children’s services and adult social care are obvious examples (although within these services there will be

## Area & Neighbourhood Governance

In **Wiltshire**, eighteen area boards have been established to give people a driving role in tackling issues of local importance. They meet every eight weeks and, between meetings, task groups made up of councillors and local people get together to look at certain issues in more detail, which cover a wide range of local public services. The work of the boards is supported by a dedicated Community Engagement Manager. This links the work of the boards to the broader work of the Council as the Council has other conversations with local people. The boards have powers to make grants, particularly for things that involve young people.

significant space for dialogue with local people and the design of area-specific services). For other matters, there is likely to be debate about the appropriate level of devolution and empowerment.

This links to the second and third points, on geography and powers. There will be a different appetite for decentralisation in different parts of the borough. An asymmetric approach makes most sense – giving local areas the power to draw down power in the way that meets their needs. The “right level” is likely to depend on the subject matter. For example:

- Hyper-local (street or Super Output Area level): conservation area designation, traffic and controlled parking, clean and green issues including maintenance of pocket parks, certain community venues;
- Local (ward level): community safety / neighbourhood policing, neighbourhood planning, certain Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) decision-making, estate management and maintenance;
- Neighbourhood level: there are eight “neighbourhoods” within the borough. These may map to primary care network (PCN) areas, school clusters, larger regeneration areas etc;
- Borough wide.

Different options might exist for structures to support these arrangements. The more power and budget that is devolved, the higher should be the expectations around governance, accountability, and checks and balances. Areas could agglomerate to meet wider goals and aspirations.

The fourth and final point is about working together, and managing disagreement. Area arrangements cannot be treated as supplicants – where established, there will need to be a parity of esteem between them and the political leadership of the borough. Whatever area or locality arrangements look like, their powers and functions will be theirs to perform. Some form of formal protection might be needed to ensure that this independence continues to be present.

### Local leadership

Later in our report we talk about the role of local councillors and their position in convening and understanding local people’s needs. The role of councillors will be critical in bringing together communities to understand what powers might be better exercised at a local level.

Even in the case of parishes, which hold their own elections and so have their own democratic mandate, councillors of the so-called “principal” authority still have a valuable role to play. They can advise, support and take an active part in area working. They can liaise between area and Borough-wide discussions and decisions. Local people can use these structures to hold their own councillors to account. Where local people are empowered to take action themselves – and have the resources and support to take that action – the role of the councillor at ward level may well change for some.



## Area & Neighbourhood Governance

This links back to the first bullet point above on clarity of responsibilities. All of this has to be fed by a commitment to “civic dialogue” – giving local people the space and information they need to reach independent and locally supported solutions. This is very different to a council-run “consultation exercise”. Instead, we are proposing putting the tools in the hands of local people and stepping back to allow conversations to happen (while still engaging in those conversations).

### Sustainability

Local people will also understand the barriers that some residents might experience in engaging in these debates and will be able to take action to eliminate these barriers. This is another area where the role of councillors can be valuable. Civic dialogue requires civic leadership. Councillors can exercise this role in leadership – not in directing conversations, but in ensuring that local people are empowered to take an active part in those conversations, and in the decisions that follow.

Later in this report we comment on the approach to empowerment and involvement that the Council might take on large scale regeneration. We think that this work – in the interests of sustainability and equality – could be framed through the principles of “community wealth building” which Newham Borough Council has endorsed. This is a people-centred approach to local economic development, which seeks to redirect wealth back into the local economy, and which places control and benefits into the hands of local people.

#### Five key principles for community wealth building

- Plural ownership of the economy;
- Making financial power work for local places;
- Fair employment and just labour markets;
- Progressive procurement of goods and services;
- Socially productive use of local and property.

The principles are about the public authority working to protect and support local people to achieve positive outcomes for themselves<sup>49</sup>.

### Funding & Participatory Budgeting

Central to the sustainability of area working arrangements is proper funding. Funding for different kinds of area structures work in different ways. There are a number of ways in which funding might be allocated.

#### • Through the Neighbourhood Community

**Infrastructure Levy.** At the moment an area-by-area allocation of £25,000, money derived from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), is made by Newham to support local community activity; the Council also employs a number of neighbourhood managers. In 2018/19 the total Newham CIL amount distributed was £11.8 million, an increase on the figure of £2.2 million from 2016/17. The March 2019 Cabinet approval of the ‘Developer Contributions Governance and Funding Allocation Strategy’ identified that up to 15% of CIL monies collected from across the borough will be divided equally and attributed to be spent in consultation with the 8 community neighbourhood areas. These changes represent important new forms of participatory neighbourhood or area-based engagement with residents. Newham is a borough experiencing significant redevelopment, in the Royal Docks, Stratford and elsewhere. The existence of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) provides an opportunity to think differently about how local people might be empowered to take a role in directing resources, and setting priorities, for the areas in which they live. We think that the Council can commit spending to local priorities either directly or through a more targeted approach to the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy. As well as making money available for substantive activity on the ground, NCIL or other funding could also provide a pot for supporting local participatory activity, driven by local people themselves. This would be a natural evolution of the strong foundations put in place by the Council for the management of CIL;

- **Precept.** Formal bodies like parishes are funded by a precept – a charge made to local people, which is billed as part of the council tax bill for people living in the relevant area. On account of this, parishes benefit from independence – over budgets and priorities – which is formalised in law. This formal distinctiveness is often

<sup>49</sup> CLES (2020), What is community wealth building? <https://cles.org.uk/community-wealth-building/what-is-community-wealth-building/> (Accessed 3 April 2020)



## Area & Neighbourhood Governance

attractive to local people. The fact that parishes are under separate democratic control – directed by parish councillors – might also be attractive. We look at parishes in more depth below.

Newham has already introduced a limited form of ‘participatory budgeting’ (PB) for its annual budget. The annual budgeting process offers local councillors a vehicle through which to engage regularly with citizens on strategic and operational priorities. However, to be credible PB has to be relevant to the interests of local people and to make the best use of the contributions where they have a differential advantage. In particular, around the world PB has been seen as a good way for local people to influence the overall city-wide budget by identifying priority outcomes (rather than specific and detailed policy choices). Again, at operational level, if PB is attractively packaged, it can empower local people to get engaged in suggesting their priorities for new community initiatives at neighbourhood (or even street) level. These are both areas in which citizens can bring knowledge and experience which are distinctively different from the expertise of the council’s politicians and staff.

A word of caution needs to be voiced in relation to the use of participatory budgeting to bring about savings. If this involves simply asking everybody to vote on services to be cut, the local Council and Mayor are unlikely to gain any new or valuable insights. Clearly, local people tend to prioritise the services they use and to vote for cuts in services they don’t use or don’t know about. This means the resulting proposals are not based on experience and can merely be used as a legitimating mechanism for austerity measures. An example of a much more strategic and elaborate participatory budgeting process to achieve savings has been carried out by Zeist Council in the Netherlands in a carefully sequenced approach in close cooperation with local councillors.



## Area & Neighbourhood Governance

### PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN ZEIST COUNCIL, NETHERLANDS

Based on the belief that citizens have expertise, experience and skills to find new solutions, the City of Zeist launched a citizen engagement process to close a fiscal gap of €6m.

Using an open call (both online and in the local press), citizens were invited to participate in the dialogue. Citizens coming forward to participate were divided into eight committees based on their specific expertise, experience and interest. For example, both the street-level social worker and the jobless single-mother participated in the Social Care and Welfare Committee. As a result, each committee consisted of experts – whether ‘experts by experience’ or ‘experts by knowledge’ – rather than every citizen discussing all kinds of issues outside of their expertise.

Although the local councillors were not involved in the discussions held by the ‘citizen experts’, they had an important role at both initial and final stages of the process. In the initial stage, the Council set out a clear framework for the framework and specified the policy issues to be discussed and the financial savings to be achieved by each committee. At the end of the process, the Council had the final say as to whether to adopt or reject proposals and had to give feedback on the decisions it took. Although the councillors therefore mostly had an ambassadorial role during the process, they had the critical role in approving the final strategic plans of each committee (the ‘green papers’).

Two officers per expert committee had the responsibility of facilitating the dialogue and of keeping the debate moving – a so-called chef de dossier and an assistant. The public officers were chosen on the basis of their enthusiasm and competencies, and not on the basis of their professional track records or expertise. Their role was explicitly limited to facilitating the process, while the contribution of ideas was reserved to the ‘citizen experts’.

Within a period of three months, two hundred experts discussed eight topics in eight expert committees. The PB process achieved the required savings and all the stakeholders involved felt it had been a useful process.

Source: Overmans, T. and Schepers, A. (2015), *Governance International Case Study*. <http://www.govint.org/good-practice/case-studies/the-austerity-dialogue-in-zeist/>.

## AMSTERDAM



## Area & Neighbourhood Governance

As noted above, Newham also makes use of what it calls “citizen’s assemblies” at neighbourhood level, to determine local priorities. The Neighbourhood Citizens’ Assemblies allow residents of eight neighbourhoods, consisting of two or three wards, to agree on the allocation of £25k for local projects. The Assemblies result in Community Plans, allocated £25k each.

The initial set of these assemblies were held from 2018 to 2020. The goals of the assemblies were for residents to:

- Set the priorities for each Community Plan
- Discuss and work together with others to find solutions to local problems
- Connect with other local people and share knowledge
- Set up local projects
- Find out what is happening in their local area
- Give directions on how funding available to their area is spent

The first round of these assemblies, which determined the major priorities of each Community Neighbourhood, was held in September and October 2018. Five of the top ten priorities related to the development and redevelopment of neighbourhoods:

- Affordable housing and homelessness
- Regeneration money for community development
- Community development and cohesion
- Environment, parks and green spaces
- High street facilities

The collection of views and voting was facilitated through Mentimeter software and displayed for participants in real time. Participatory budgeting processes with local communities were used to determine the Community Plans.

### 3.3 STRUCTURAL MODELS FOR AREA WORKING

#### Parish Councils

“Urban” parishes benefit from the same powers as any other parish council, although the challenges and opportunities they face are likely to be quite different. Parishes’ work has traditionally focused on “clean and green” issues, but newer parishes in urban areas have seen their role as broader than this. They can cover support for the arts and local community work (which might include grants), youth services and certain issues relating to the safety of the local community (such as street lighting).

In **Queen’s Park, Westminster** an urban parish was established following a community governance review carried out by Westminster Council in 2012. The parish was the first to be established in the capital for many years and remains the only one in Greater London – despite interest from other areas<sup>50</sup>.

Queen’s Park is an area of fairly significant deprivation in central north west London. It is a community dominated by Victorian-era terraces. A Campaign for a Community Council in Queen’s Park was a long time in gestation. It was seen as a way to provide more sustainability to community activity in the light of the removal of funding after the recession – although not to plug gaps left by withdrawal of the community council. The Paddington Development Trust was instrumental to the sifting of approaches and alternatives.

A critical part of the approach in QP was the building of widespread community support for the establishment of the body. This included door to door outreach and meetings led by local people. The prioritisation process for the new Council’s activities was informed by this activity. It has echoes in the co-production approaches that the Commission took evidence on based on examples in Knowle West, Bristol.

The parish council is funded by precept. The level of the precept in 2018/19 was £46.38 for a Band D property.

<sup>50</sup> More information can be found at <https://www.futureoflondon.org.uk/2014/07/25/queens-park-community-council-localism-in-action/>

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Certain parish councils may benefit from having a general power of competence (like principal councils) if they meet certain eligibility criteria. They can raise a small community precept to spend on local amenities like parks and green spaces, youth services, and voluntary and community sector grants. Evidence suggests that they can work well with existing council structures.

Parishes also have a representative role, particularly on issues such as planning, where they are required to be notified by the local planning authority of any planning application covering that area. Parish councils' representative role (in this and other areas) provides a strong voice for local people.

There is a formal legal process that must be pursued for a new parish council to be established. This is set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007<sup>51</sup>. It hinges on the completion of a "community governance review", on which subject Government produced guidance in 2010.<sup>52 53</sup>

Other measures for neighbourhood and locality working  
There are a number of options for how area governance might look. Some of these might end up co-existing in the borough at the same time. Options include<sup>54</sup>:

- **Establishing area-based consultation boards:**

Depending on the model the Council adopts to develop and refine policy, local boards (which might either be set up by the Council or formed through agreement with local people) could provide local space for those policies to be discussed. This would be a way to bring "strategic" policymaking down to street level, and to ensure that Borough-wide policies could be refined to reflect the needs and concerns of people at local level. Boards might

make more traditional consultations carried out by the Council (for example, those relating to statutory duties) easier and cheaper to undertake, as well as increasing the quality of public engagement in those exercises. For wider engagement, such boards could extend and deepen the Council's understanding of people's expectations, negating the need for the establishment of novel consultation mechanisms for different policies, which can lead to a sense of fragmentation and a sense of "consultation fatigue". Such boards could contribute to a better sense of community ownership of priorities, particularly alongside a broader approach to civic education.

- **Establish neighbourhood or area forums:** Many Councils operate traditional area forums or "locality boards" – bodies usually establish on a ward basis and often chaired by a local councillor. Area forums often provide a space for the discussion of "clean and green" issues, planning matters and other issues of local importance. Southwark's ward forums and Lewisham's local assemblies are a good example of this in practice. Other models are available; for example, under neighbourhood planning arrangements, such bodies could play a more active part in planning decision making.
- Potentially, **budgets can be devolved to local bodies** to spend on issues deemed to be a priority by local people. In some councils, these boards or forums are defined and controlled by the Council itself, with the Council setting the agenda and approach. In some councils, these forums can even take the form of formal council committees. Sometimes, these kinds of forums have no real power and are seen as talking shops. Different neighbourhoods might have different expectations on this point. It would be for the Council and local people to decide how to balance the need for the efficiency that comes from Borough-wide

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<sup>51</sup> Specifically, Part 4 of that Act. Consequential legislation includes the Local Government Act 1972, and regulations including the Review: Local Government (Parishes and Parish Councils) (England) Regulations 2008 (SI 2008:625) and the Local Government Finance (New Parishes) Regulations 2008 (SI 2008:626).

<sup>52</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/8312/1527635.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/8312/1527635.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> NALC (2011), Community governance reviews: some lessons from recent practice. <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/our-work/create-a-council-resources/1357-community-governance-reviews-some-lessons-from-recent-practice/file> (Accessed 3 April 2020)

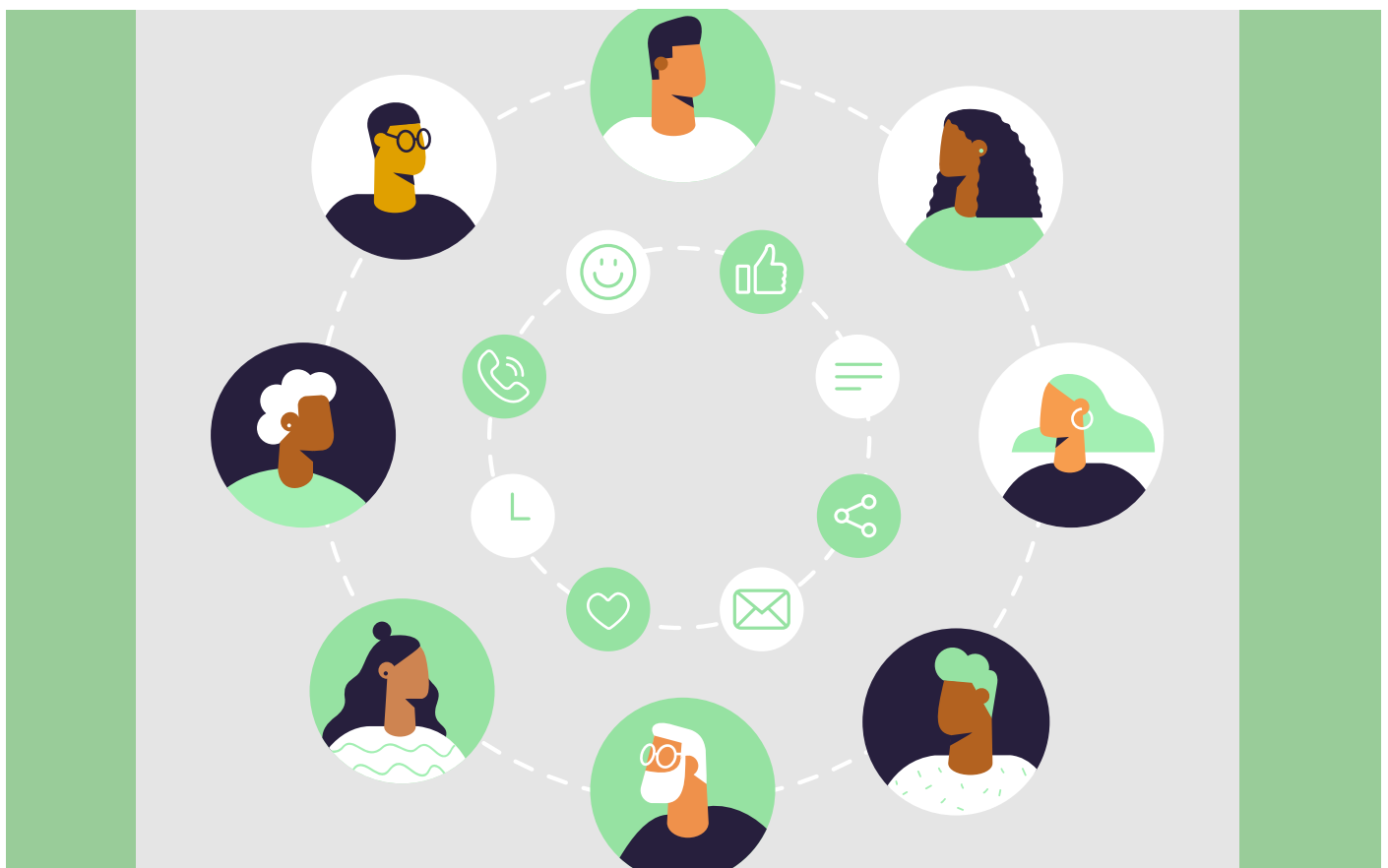
<sup>54</sup> A further list is provided in Birmingham City Council (2018), Working with Neighbourhoods Policy Document, p6, [https://www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/economy/working-together-in-birminghams-neighbourhoods/supporting\\_documents/Working%20with%20Neighbourhoods%20Policy%20Statement.pdf](https://www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/economy/working-together-in-birminghams-neighbourhoods/supporting_documents/Working%20with%20Neighbourhoods%20Policy%20Statement.pdf) (Accessed 13 February 2020)

## Area & Neighbourhood Governance

services with the need for a focus on local needs.

- In some places, **forums have been set up to develop and agree “neighbourhood plans”** – formal Council planning documents used to make decisions on planning applications under the Localism Act 2011.
- The Council could support the **establishment of a Community Interest Company**, co-operative or other

kind of local formal body for community action: This would help local people to work together to tackle local social problems – although the contract-based model for delivery under which this work would probably be undertaken might be unattractive to local people. Its attractiveness would depend on the willingness of people in the local community to be part of an organisation that might well end up delivering services “on behalf of” (i.e. funded by) the Council.



### NEW ZEALAND



### 3.4 MAKING IT WORK: A STRUCTURE TO DEVELOP AREA-BASED WORKING ACROSS NEWHAM IN CONTEXT OF THE NEWHAM MAYORAL MODEL

#### TWO DIFFERENT MODELS: BIRMINGHAM AND AUCKLAND (NZ)

In Birmingham, a town council (Sutton Coldfield) has existed since 2016. Birmingham City Council held a community governance review in 2015 which resulted in a recommendation for the establishment of a new parish covering the town<sup>55</sup> – now the largest parish in the country.

As a city, Birmingham faces unique challenges around representation. The council is the largest by population in the country, and although it has over a hundred members, they each represent a strikingly large portion of the population (the member:population ratio is one of the highest in the country).

Later, in 2018, Birmingham City Council sought to put together a broader framework for local devolution – the “Working with Neighbourhoods” policy<sup>56</sup>. This sets out an overall approach to working with neighbourhoods by:

- Developing a “ward plan” for every ward, helping the council and its partners to work to secure resources from a range of places to support local priorities;
- Developing local devolution deals for “specific area that have adopted parish, town or neighbourhood councils or perhaps other forms of governance suitable for this purpose”. This is a permissive framework, allowing structures to be developed which suit the needs of each ward;
- By working with local people to ensure that they are aware of how they can contribute to this agenda, and by promoting the establishment of new local councils where people want them.

This work is governed by a “Framework of Relationships”, setting out the available models and the mechanisms for securing devolution within those structures. A system of Charters will embed the relationships between the city council and local bodies. There is a particular set of principles and expectations to govern local “devolution deals”.

In **Auckland, New Zealand**, new “local boards” were created after a local government reorganisation in 2010. The changes saw two-tier governance abolished and a single Auckland Council created, replacing a handful of smaller authorities and the territorial government. Alongside the Council sit 21 local boards. Local boards share responsibility with the Council’s “Governing Body” (loosely equivalent to Full Council). Local boards reach agreement with the Governing Body over funding and plans (which operate on a three-year cycle). Local boards by and large have responsibility for community-facing facilities, but the planning process involves the boards and the Governing Body entering into a negotiation over which powers will be allocated. This is subject to an independent dispute resolution mechanism.

Once the local plan (with its associated 18 allocations of responsibility) has been agreed, the local board has full autonomy within the framework of that plan (and within the law) and is accountable directly to local people for its implementation. Funding is allocated according to a transparent formula agreed as part of the Council’s long-term plan. Additional funds are also made available – for example, the local transport authority ring-fences NZ\$10 million, allocated according to population, across the local boards for local transport projects. The arrangements that govern the relationship between the city council and its local boards act as both a guarantee of independence for the boards and a way for the city council to work with them.

This presents a way to secure the maximum possible local devolution while falling just short of total independence. It could be a halfway house towards the establishment of an urban parish – or an end in itself, if the right procedural framework can be developed to make it work to everyone’s satisfaction. There was controversy at the time of these moves; local boards were seen not to have sufficient autonomy, and the fear was that local democracy would suffer, with big decisions being made at a remote city level.

<sup>55</sup> Birmingham City Council (2015), Governance Review Statement of Recommendations, [https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/2544/community\\_governance\\_review\\_statement\\_of\\_recommendationspdf](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/2544/community_governance_review_statement_of_recommendationspdf) (Accessed 13 February 2020)

<sup>56</sup> Birmingham City Council (2018), Localism in Birmingham: A Framework for Future Policy, [https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/11837/localism\\_in\\_birmingham](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/11837/localism_in_birmingham) (Accessed 13 February 2020)



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Following Birmingham's example – setting an overall framework within which local areas might choose to draw down more powers than their neighbours, and in which different areas might choose to agglomerate in different ways – is attractive to us. It allows local people to self-organise – street by street if necessary – and for the council to support them in this activity in a way that is transparent.

This will require that Newham carries out a borough-wide community governance review, as set out in Chapter 3 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, to put in place a framework within which area working can evolve and develop. Through measures like “Shape Newham”, the council has attempted to facilitate these

conversations at a borough-wide level. We see this exercise as a continuation of that activity.

We see ward councillors as playing a central role as this review develops, borough-wide and within the communities they represent. Ward councillors can mobilise communities to talk to each other, working to support people to build capacity to understand the options available to them. Ward councillors could play an integral role in permanent ward-based (or more local) arrangements. Ward councillors could also play a vital role in drawing the insights and views of local areas into policy debate at the council, at full Council meetings and at scrutiny.

**Cornwall** underwent a unitary reorganisation in 2009. A large number of district councils were abolished with a single county unitary being created as a replacement. Cornwall covers an extremely large area which encompasses 213 civil parishes – its community governance situation is hence extremely complex.

These issues were discussed in some detail in the 2016 Governance Review, on which Cornwall were assisted by a small external group of experts. This work was led by councillors and full details of their work can be found at <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/councillors-and-democracy/governance-how-council-decisions-are-made/2016-governance-review-of-cornwall-council/>

Partially in response to this work, Cornwall Council are now engaged in a county-wide community governance review. This work is part-completed, with initial proposals out for consultation. The details can be found at <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/elections/community-governance-reviews/>

**The Commission recommends that Newham expands participatory, area-based democracy in the borough. Funding allocated for decision on the basis of neighbourhood participation should be substantially increased from the current level of £25,000. The aim should be to spend a minimum of 20% of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) resources through neighbourhood or area-based participation. Processes for the development of neighbourhood priorities should be aligned with engagement on the annual budget cycle of the borough, so that residents can feed in their priorities at the earliest stages to the overall council budget.**

**The Commission recommends that a borough-wide community governance review be carried out, to co-produce with local people a framework and structure to how devolution and area governance will work.** This community governance review could incorporate a soon-to-start evaluation of community assemblies, and would give a central role to ward councillors in engaging and working with local people to talk through what model and approach to area working makes most sense to them. **As part of this community governance review, the Commission recommends that the council determines an area to pilot a new urban parish or ‘Community Council’,** such as that in Queen's Park, Westminster.



# Section

Participatory & Deliberative  
Democracy

# Participatory & Deliberative Democracy

## PARTICIPATORY AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Across the world, new forms of deliberative and participatory democracy are being implemented, particularly at the city or local level. In recent years, Newham Borough Council has developed new forms of participatory governance and established Citizens' Assemblies. It should now build on these to create permanent institutional democratic structures for participation and deliberation by its residents.

**Newham should develop a framework for citizen participation which clearly sets out what all stakeholders will contribute, and the objectives (but also the limitations) of public participation. Such a statement should also set out the core principles underpinning effective public participation.**

**The Commission recommends the establishment of a standing or permanent citizens' or deliberative assembly for Newham, to meet a minimum of twice a year. The citizens' assembly would respond to, and act on important, emerging local issues. Its membership should be selected by sortition and a proportion should rotate each year. This assembly would select issues to deliberate upon and initiate policy agendas for the Council. It would dock directly into the council's formal decision-making systems, both through the scrutiny function (in terms of alignment of work programmes and support) and directly with the Mayor (by feeding into cabinet decision-making through changes to the council's constitution)**

## 4.1 BACKGROUND

There is experience in local government in England and further afield of a range of methods and approaches to deliberation and participation in the development of local policy. These include:

- Deliberative democratic initiatives, such as citizens' assemblies and citizens' panels;
- Participatory democratic mechanisms, such as participatory budgeting;
- Other forms of participatory policymaking (for example, the development of neighbourhood plans). We cover matters relating to the built environment in the section below.

For a long time, "participation" in local government was framed by the New Public Management-inspired model of consumer-led local service delivery<sup>57</sup>, defined by the relationship between the council as "provider" and the citizen as "customer", in a way that tends to elide the importance of local democratic systems. We have taken evidence on the way that, in Newham, the council/resident relationship sometimes feels quite "transactional" – reflecting this traditional orthodoxy.<sup>58</sup> It is also apparent in the frustration experienced by some councillors, much of whose work is dominated by case work<sup>59</sup> – sorting out local people's problems – rather than some of the wider roles that councillors can perform (and which we highlight in section 8.1).

<sup>57</sup> Hood C, "A public management for all seasons?" (1991) Public Administration 69, 3-19, see also summary at <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/new-public-management.htm> (accessed 15 November 2019)

<sup>58</sup> Reflecting comments made by local people (see Appendix)

<sup>59</sup> In our councillors survey, nearly 100% of respondents said that helping with local people's problems was a key feature of their day to day work – although most although indicated that they recognised that this should remain a core part of the role.

## Participatory & Deliberative Democracy

In the wider local government sector, these prevailing attitudes are changing. There is a recognition that the traditional consumer/provider relationship is increasingly unfit for purpose as a way to describe the overarching relationships between the council and the people it serves. Many now advocate for a shift to a new “community paradigm” in which councils, and councillors, act as convenors and facilitators of action across a “place.”<sup>60</sup>

A robust and strategic approach to participation which takes account of this shift of relationships in the London Borough of Newham is critical. Part of this involves taking stock of existing participation initiatives in the Borough and evaluating lessons learnt and results achieved so far. In particular, there is the need to take a more systematic approach to citizen participation. This may involve experimenting and evaluating new approaches to public participation as suggested by the Commission but also widening and deepening existing participation approaches, based on evidence that these have made a difference.

In particular, there is a need to identify what people's expectations of participation, deliberation and co-production might be and to negotiate mutually agreed

expectations. This could take the form of a statement on citizen participation – similar to charters which have been developed in European cities – which clearly sets out what all stakeholders will contribute, and the objectives (but also the limitations) of public participation. Furthermore, such a statement should also set out the core principles underpinning effective participation. Social justice and equality of citizenship, transparency and accountability are fundamental. Indeed, through effective participation may be one very important way of giving these public governance principles more attention, as the more intensive collaboration with citizens opens up the possibility of greater challenge.

This follows through into the views of local people in how they engage with the council. Around 30% of people to whom we spoke had experienced frustrations in “getting things done” with the council. Although we think that the future of participation lies with move on from a purely transactional relationship between local people and the council, the fact remains that many council services do by necessity reinforce this transactional nature. This is why – before moving on to the more ambitious aims in this section – we need to focus on the important lesson of “getting the boring stuff right”.



<sup>60</sup> NLGN (2019). The community paradigm

## Participatory & Deliberative Democracy

### COMMUNITY VIEWS ON CURRENT ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COUNCIL, IN GENERAL

“There is a gap between what the Mayor says and the reality of experience communicating with the department. You have to keep starting all over again.”

“You jump so many hurdles – they don’t hear from you direct, so messages get diluted”

30% of the 146 comments we received on “having your voice heard” related to people’s issues with reporting something, accessing services or making on-line contact with the council.

13% of comments about not listening, or poor listening, on the part of the council. One person said it’s easy to be heard if you agree with the council, and that you “have to use their language”. Some people also spoke about inaction, and a lack of reply to questions (including issues such as housing repairs).

Newham is a diverse area, and some people felt that people of certain ethnicities were given preference above others, particularly where councillors were of a different ethnicity; this goes alongside a concern that certain groups are not represented at the highest level on the council.

It is important to view the concerns of local people in the context of the extremely high overall satisfaction figures in the Newham Survey 2019 to which we referred in section 1 above. But the council needs to be aware that these concerns exist, and needs to have a plan to address them, so that a strong foundation can be built for effective co-production and participation with local people in the future.



# Participatory & Deliberative Democracy

## Accessibility and equality

We took evidence on design and bias in digital democracy (which we discuss in more detail below) and on wider participation. Bias is likely to be “designed in” to the way that public bodies choose to frame the issues which they want to open up for participation<sup>61</sup>. This initial framing is crucial if participation is going to be meaningful.

Speaking the language of a wider range of groups and listening to them by letting them frame and contextualise their own challenges and aspirations is a way to break down barriers, rather than the council going to people with its own views of what the problems and solutions might be. It makes it more likely that people will be able to reach common ground on matters on which they really disagree. If the council has built a reputation for listening then when it deploys more formal approaches to consult, it will yield better results. Staff training is important in this context, as is training for councillors. Dialogue can help to build a shared sense of roles and responsibilities.

The most important issue is understanding the question for which an answer is sought.<sup>62</sup> This starts right at the beginning, with proper discussion of the actual challenge and how people define and discuss that challenge. Unconscious bias on the part of officials can negatively influence this – bringing more lived experience into the system is important because it challenges this worldview (which can result in poor results when the institution involved refuses to accept that challenge, as in the case of NHS Citizen, and as in the case where social models of disability challenge more traditional medical models). It is worth remembering that ideas that change society don’t tend to start in the institutions we have, but instead in the civic environment. Putting leaders and officials directly into that conversation - often through ‘on-the-spot accountability’ - is important because through this immersion they will get insights more quickly<sup>63</sup>.

Working with community groups can help to encourage participation from a wider segment of the population and it also recognises the diversity of skillsets. Some people will want to talk and act as advocates, others may not. The council should recognise that while only a small subset of people may want to engage in a certain way that doesn’t mean that the council has to adopt a single set of approaches which might be described as inclusive. Part of listening is about establishing and building up trust, making clear at the outset what is up for grabs. This demonstrates why the feedback loop – providing updates and information on involvement and results – is so important.



<sup>61</sup> Evidence from Ben Fowkes (Delib), First Evidence Hearing, 25 November 2019

<sup>62</sup> Evidence from Henry Tam (Question the Powerful), First Evidence Hearing, 25 November 2019

<sup>63</sup> Evidence from Matthew Pike, Written Evidence, 8th December, 2019



# Participatory & Deliberative Democracy

## 4.2 UNDERSTANDING WHAT WE MEAN BY EFFECTIVE, MEANINGFUL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The word “public participation” covers many different ways of collaborating with people. At one end of the spectrum, limited, formal consultation exercises are, technically, “participative”. We are more interested in more innovative methods which directly involve local people. A variety of councils and other organisations have set out their own sense of what principles and values underpin effective participation<sup>64</sup>. The council should speak to its residents to develop a shared understanding of what such principles might look like for Newham.

Some methods of participation are also “deliberative”. This means that they involve citizens working through and refining options and solutions in a planned, systematic and transparent way. Sometimes, this deliberation happens in a way that involves local people on an equal footing to professionals, and councillors.

Many of the general principles around the pros and cons, and barriers, to deliberation have been extensively researched<sup>65</sup>, and we have considered them in deciding whether a different approach to deliberation and co-production make sense. Deliberation and co-production cannot be carried out for their own sake, to lend authenticity to decisions which are still designed and developed in traditional ways<sup>66</sup>. Participation must be meaningfully diverse – taking account of an area like Newham’s demographic complexity and the huge range of skills and perspectives held by local people<sup>67</sup>. A change in approach here means a more fundamental change to the council’s way of working – changes that we think align with the aspirations of the Corporate Plan, and the council’s overarching culture change plans as well. Most fundamentally, putting in place new and ambitious systems for participation first involves clear action to build trust and relationships, challenging existing attitudes<sup>68</sup> – with those actions being a key part of any new participative system itself.<sup>69</sup>

### COUNCILLORS’ VIEWS ON EXISTING ENGAGEMENT METHODS

“There has definitely been a positive shift in the opportunities for people to get involved in shaping decisions that affect their lives. It would be good if people from a wider range of backgrounds were involved in politics locally”

“The council needs to improve its communications, and announcements need to be decipherable”

<sup>64</sup> Involve/NCC: “Deliberative public engagement: nine principles” (2008). Accessed 12 November 2019 at [http://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Deliberative-public-engagement-nine-principles\\_0.pdf](http://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Deliberative-public-engagement-nine-principles_0.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> Bächtiger, A., Dryzek, J.S., Mansbridge, J., and Warren, M, The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy, (Oxford University Press, 2018). See also Pearce, N. (2019). Realism and Democratic Renewal, in H. Tam (Ed.), Whose Government is it? The Renewal of State-Citizen Cooperation Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

<sup>66</sup> Evidence from Graham Smith (University of Westminster), First Evidence Hearing, 25 November 2019

<sup>67</sup> Evidence from Simon Woolley (Operation Black Vote), Second Evidence Hearing, 10 January 2020

<sup>68</sup> Evidence from Areeq Chowdhury (WebRoots Democracy), Second Evidence Hearing, 10 January 2020

<sup>69</sup> Evidence from Tim Hughes (Involve), First Evidence Hearing, 25 November 2019

## ACTION TO ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE IN NEWHAM

LBN's Brighter Futures Directorate has recently expanded and now has a greater focus on participatory methods, including increasing engagement, and promoting the influence of young people within the borough. Some recent innovations include:

- Youth citizens' assemblies;
- Young health champions;
- Young commissioners for children's services;
- Interviews carried out by young people as part of the recruitment process for senior council posts;
- The introduction of a full time participation team to support Youth Movements.

Further work to promote influence and participation will be done by:

**Engagement** – Participation Workers will develop outreach work across the borough as well as engage young people with SEND, who identify as LGBTQ, Young Carers, and Looked after Children; supporting them to access the Council's youth offer. Through having contact outside of Youth Zones, the Participation Team will also be able to work with young people to help develop future projects and shape the Council's current provision, so that it is more accessible and meets their needs and aspirations.

**Influence** – the Brighter Futures Directorate has developed a participation model that allows young people at a Youth Zone level to come together to discuss the issues that most affect them, through members committees, Youth Movements, and Assemblies. Thematic forums will also be set up which will be pan-borough and work collectively with young people to identify solutions that can be taken forward to influence council policy, youth-led Social Action projects, and campaigns. Current work includes the review and development of the Children in Care Council which feeds into the Corporate Parenting Board, and which is recruiting for a team of Young Commissioners to take on a range of tasks within the Children's Social Care team including assessing possible placement providers, attending monitoring visits and feeding into service specifications for commissioned services. The Directorate are also working with the Public Health team to develop a model for Youth Health Champions, with young people receiving support to effectively advocate and campaign around key public health issues in their local areas.

A further piece of influencing work that young people were involved in through Youth Movements was supporting the work of the newly formed Youth Safety Board which the Mayor inaugurated at the start of her tenure in 2018. This was in response to her pledge to ensure Newham is the best borough to grow up in in the world. The board was formed from a diverse range of people including parents who had

lost their children to violence, surgeons, and professionals from mental health and wellbeing, universities, schools and colleges, local police, and the VCS, with young people at the core of the process. The task was to forensically analyse the Newham context and how that might fit within a public health approach, and come up with a bespoke set of recommendations that were co-produced and designed to be delivered by a cross sector partnership with the community at its heart. This youth-led process set out a clear aim from the council to ensure that young people's experiences were placed front and centre in any decisions made about them in the borough.

## COUNCILLORS' VIEWS ON ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE

"Greater awareness in schools" ... "Youth council and young mayor" ... "Promote youth hubs and activities"

"It's easy to find most young people. Most of them are in school or further education establishments. We need to work better with schools and encourage participation through schools. We also need to work with people who work with young people – sports coaches, churches etc"

"We need to look at the transitory nature of people coming in and out, not just the young people that were born/schooled in the borough. Things like a tenants' pack when someone signs up for council tax, with information on rubbish collection, council services and opportunities. Making the council's website better and more [intuitive] but also physical adverts around targeted stations and bus stops that we know have high visibility in young people would help. Reaching out to the various sports/scouts/cadets engages people outside school hours and will have better landing"

"I don't think the council is making enough use of its young councillors. I am a young person, went to school in the Borough and have a lot of links with your young people. I think rather than using the organisation to reach out to young people. Use the young influencer types and actually provide young people with the tools to be engaged. I think the council lacks an understanding that lots of our young people are in fact parents to their own parents, and should speak more about it. I know from personal experience it would be helpful if the council acknowledged things like that to make it more relatable. For example, there was a recent money workshop it wasn't well advertised and perhaps should have been catered to more young people with the recognition that some of their parents English is not their first language etc."

"The council could work more closely with schools within the borough to increase levels of political education and to encourage young people to get involved with influencing the decisions that affect their lives"

Some councillors were also keen to see the return of the Young Mayor and Young Council.

## Participatory & Deliberative Democracy

We think that Newham should actively pursue opportunities, as an integral part of the Newham Mayoral model, to spread accountability and responsibility for decision-making through participation and deliberation. Deliberation and participation should focus on building on existing conversations<sup>70</sup> – local people told us that they were concerned that the council as things stand wants to have conversations on its own terms in a way that does not fully engage with the way that dialogue and debate continues in the local community<sup>71</sup>.

Collaboration may involve breaking down assumptions and expectations – particular where residents may worry that the

council may wish to use the opportunity to impose its own views, rather than meaningfully listen to local people<sup>72</sup>.

The Commission recommends that Newham works with local people to develop a framework of mutual expectations around participation and involvement – built on trust and respect, and as an integral part of a new Newham Mayoral model. The development of this framework could be one of the first tasks of a new standing citizens' assembly (see below). The council can start now to experiment with more ambitious approaches on participation to feed into the development of this framework.

### THE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION GUIDE OF HEIDELBERG COUNCIL, GERMANY

Heidelberg Council was the first local council in Germany to agree a 'citizen participation charter' with local stakeholders in 2012. This practice is now followed by many other local councils in Germany, with the aim of making citizen participation more systematic and transparent. The Heidelberg citizen participation model involves the following core elements:

- 1) Publication of local projects which are open to citizen participation by the local council: A 'list of projects' which is published annually (both online and in all public agencies) informs citizens about participation opportunities in new planned projects at an early stage and also provides feedback on ongoing participation processes. Furthermore, citizens and local associations can suggest further projects for public participation. Citizens may also launch a local petition to open a project to citizen participation. In all cases, the local council decides on whether a project will be subject to a participatory process or not.
- 2) Co-design of the participation process: A small group of citizen volunteers and public officers agree on the participation plan – what are the objectives of citizen participation, how and when should the participation take place, which methods are to be used, what are the costs and what is the time schedule? The local council has the final decision on the concept.
- 3) Launch of the participation process
- 4) Results: The local council receives the results of the citizen participation in due time before it needs to take a decision. The councillors need to consider the results but they are not obliged to follow them. However, they need to provide feedback on the reasons why they made that specific decision.

Source: [https://www.heidelberg.de/site/Heidelberg\\_ROOT/get/documents/heidelberg/Objektdatenbank/12/PDF/12\\_pdf\\_Broschuere\\_Buergerbeteiligung\\_Kurzfassung.pdf](https://www.heidelberg.de/site/Heidelberg_ROOT/get/documents/heidelberg/Objektdatenbank/12/PDF/12_pdf_Broschuere_Buergerbeteiligung_Kurzfassung.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> Evidence from Graham Smith (University of Westminster), First Evidence Hearing, 25 November 2019

<sup>71</sup> Appendix A: Public Engagement Findings, pp29 and 33

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

# Participatory & Deliberative Democracy

## 4.3 WAYS OF WORKING TO DEVELOP MORE DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

We have looked in depth at methods that public bodies and local people can take to deliberate and decide key issues alongside each other. We have looked at “deliberative mini-publics” (DMPs) of which citizen’s assemblies are one form.

### SUCCESS FACTORS FOR DELIBERATIVE “MINI-PUBLICS”

- 1. Planning and recruitment.** This might be organised by a steward, to ensure quality and fairness (so, independent of the bodies setting up the DMP in a practical sense). This reflects the fact that legitimacy hinges on independence and the recruitment of people who reflect the local community. (Recruitment is usually by sortition). It is common for people to be offered payment for participation – particularly when people are expected to participate in a way that takes up a lot of their time. However, this can be problematic – it can complicate people’s benefits, and some people can interpret the offer as an insult. But there is a strong argument for trying to do so because a public body is benefiting from significant local experience and insight;
- 2. Learning.** Participants have access to information in person and in documentary form which they review individually and in groups. This involves questioning of these people; it rests of the ability of stewards to actively reflect a range of insights and perspectives to the participants;
- 3. Deliberation.** Participants are facilitated to work together in small groups to consider what evidence they have gathered;
- 4. Decision-making.** Learning and deliberation leads to decision-making – this is reflected in a final report through evidence-backed arguments developed through consensus. In some DMPs the purpose is not about reaching consensus but in seeing how views and opinions have changed;
- 5. Follow up.** This is about impact – sharing insights and using them to influence those with a formal power to make decisions. This is a critical part – without being able to align with traditional decision-making systems the work of a DMP may not lead to real change (which highlights the importance of the cultural issues mentioned at the outset)<sup>73</sup>.



<sup>73</sup> Escobar and Elstub, “Forms of mini-publics” (2017). Accessed 15 November 2019 at [https://newdemocracy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/docs\\_researchnotes\\_2017\\_May\\_nDF\\_RN\\_20170508\\_FormsOfMiniPublics.pdf](https://newdemocracy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/docs_researchnotes_2017_May_nDF_RN_20170508_FormsOfMiniPublics.pdf)

# Participatory & Deliberative Democracy

## Citizens' assemblies

Citizens' assemblies are one model for deliberation.<sup>74</sup>

Citizens' assemblies can be standing, permanent bodies or they can be established for a specific time-limited purpose. Standing bodies can look at a number of issues over time. Newham has used a citizens' assembly to help develop its policy response to the climate emergency. In February 2020, 36 residents met over three evenings and a weekend to develop recommendations in response to the question: "How can the council and residents work together to reach the aspiration of being carbon zero by 2050 at the latest?". The Citizens' Assembly made 21 recommendations to the council on a range of issues such as education and information; energy policy; travel and transportation; food and recycling; buildings and housing and the wider environment and outdoor space. The Council will respond to each recommendation which will inform the council's Climate Emergency Action Plan.

There are some key principles underpinning the design and process for citizens' assemblies. It is important to understand and get this right – a number of systems and approaches are being designed and deployed at the moment which describe themselves as citizens' assemblies, but which fail to live up to these principles. Getting this right reflects the need to have clear expectations.

- The questions for the assembly to address must relate to topics which are not readily addressed in existing representative structures – either because they are complex or cross-cutting, or because decision-makers have struggled to tackle them conventionally.
- Secondly, the assembly should be composed of a representative but randomly selected group of people. This is a process called "sortition" which we describe in more detail below.
- Thirdly, bringing those people together in the same space to deliberate. This starts with learning (where assembly members hear from expert witnesses), moves to looking at the trade-off between different courses of action and then finally deliberation and decision. Graham Smith told the Commission more about how experts might be selected to support this process. They might be described better as "witnesses" because often they will bring practical

experience to bear on the deliberations rather than traditional professional expertise. In terms of selection for these people, it is usual for an advisory board to be established with people of different perspectives who can collectively agree that they are happy with the range of witnesses being engaged, as happened with the Scottish citizens' assembly on Brexit.

Citizens' assemblies are costly to establish and run. They require a meaningful, high profile and long-term commitment to operate effectively. This does not come without risk. We have considered this carefully; given the challenges and opportunities that Newham faces, an investment in this, as part of a wider model for democratic reform, will pay back over time. This is because citizens' assemblies have the potential to engage with the necessary trade-offs involved in policymaking on complex issues<sup>75</sup>. This is not about palming off difficult decisions onto local people but about using a citizens' assembly to have a meaningful, wider public debate on matters of real community concern. It is this aspect which leads us to conclude that a standing citizens' assembly has the potential to formally sit alongside other council governance systems, tempering and challenging formal power structures and developing innovative solutions. A number of councillors responding to our survey were positive about making more effective use of citizen's assemblies, but there were dissenting voices. One councillor said,

"I don't think the citizens assemblies work. They are not representative of the communities we wish to serve. Generally, people who attend these forums are often engaged in politics. The Mayor has mentioned several times that she is not happy with comms and I agree, and I think we should use more [...] modern media to reach out to groups which are often hard to reach".

We accept this challenge – we also think that as the council moves forward, it has to be clearer in the use of the language it uses – in particular how it uses the term "citizen's assemblies". Tim Hughes at Involve has highlighted the importance of using the right term for the right tool. In future, we think the council should be clear that by "citizens' assembly" it means that model we reflect on and recommend in this section: one whose membership is selected by sortition and whose work feeds directly into council decision-making systems.

<sup>74</sup> Involve: "Methods: Citizens' Assembly" (2019). Accessed 15 November 2019 at <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/methods/citizens-assembly>

<sup>75</sup> Evidence from Ben Fowkes (Delib), First Evidence Hearing, 25 November 2019

# Participatory & Deliberative Democracy

## CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES: EXAMPLES

### MADRID OBSERVATORY.

A standing citizens' assembly called the "City Observatory" was established to shadow city government, discuss and deliberate on issues and submit issues for formal decision. However, following a change in the political leadership of the city the powers of the Observatory have been significantly curtailed – ostensibly because it cuts across the role of other bodies, but also because it was seen as "belonging" to the previous administration<sup>76</sup>. This highlights political risks around buy-in.<sup>77</sup>

### IRISH CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

Between 2016 and 2018 a Citizens' Assembly was established by the Oireachtas to consider issues of particular national contention; one issue reviewed was the Eighth Amendment of the Irish constitution on abortion rights. The work of the Assembly and the subsequent public debate led to a referendum which led to the amendment being repealed, and abortion becoming legal.<sup>78</sup>

### OSTBELGIEN

In the German-speaking part of Belgium, the parliament voted in 2019 to establish a Citizens' Council, a new democratic institution developed to complement the elected parliamentary chamber.

The first of its kind to be embedded in legislation, the permanent council – or 'Permanent Citizens' Dialogue' – has an inaugural twenty-four members who met for the first time in September 2019. These members will rotate out over an eighteen-month period; every six months, eight members will be replaced by a new group. New members will be randomly invited through a civic lottery. The council has two mandated roles. First, it is tasked with selecting up to three issues to assign to citizens' assemblies. Each assembly will have up to fifty randomly selected citizens and meet a minimum of three times over three months to deliberate and develop recommendations for parliament. Parliament is then required by law to debate the recommendations at least twice, after which it, the government, the relevant commission, and the responsible minister must reply. The council's second role is to monitor the parliamentary debates and the progress made in implementing any agreed-upon actions.

Within a few years, every resident of Ostbelgien — a community of around 80,000 people — will have received an invitation to participate in either the Citizens' Council or a Citizens' Assembly. This effort, and similar endeavours around the world, could be the start of a period of transformation that changes the architecture of representative democracy. But fully grasping the effects will only be possible through consistent and constant examination of the processes and outcomes<sup>79</sup>.

<sup>76</sup> La Vanguardia, news article, 13/9/19 (in Spanish). Accessed 15 November 2019 at <https://www.lavanguardia.com/local/madrid/20190913/47320881340/el-gobierno-modificara-el-observatorio-de-la-ciudad-para-reservar-los-foros-locales-como-herramienta-de-participacion.html>

<sup>77</sup> Webpage (in Spanish). Accessed 15 November 2019 at <https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/citizens-assembly-guide>

<sup>78</sup> The Citizens' Assembly, "First report and recommendations on the eighth amendment" (2017). Accessed 15 November 2019 at <https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/The-Eighth-Amendment-of-the-Constitution/Final-Report-on-the-Eighth-Amendment-of-the-Constitution/Final-Report-incl-Appendix-A-D.pdf>

<sup>79</sup> Reuchamps M (2020), Belgium's experiment in permanent forms of deliberative democracy <http://constitutionnet.org/news/belgiums-experiment-permanent-forms-deliberative-democracy> (Accessed 10 April 2020)



## Participatory & Deliberative Democracy

### SORTITION

“Sortition” - selection by lot - is the process by which the membership of a citizens’ assembly is arrived at.

This involves inviting a large number of people to participate and based on responses sifting people to produce a representative sample. This can be based on a two-step process:

- A large mailshot to 8,000 to 10,000 randomly selected household (with some oversampling for certain groups)
- Taking a gap analysis to identify underrepresented groups and on this basis creating a stratified random sample.

It is possible that very small minority groups may not be represented as assemblies may number around 50 people. This will usually provoke public bodies to carry out further engagement with these groups – it is important to recognise that a citizens’ assembly will not be a system used in isolation. In some places, politicians may be involved in assemblies as full members (for example, in Ireland) – in others, they may play a role but not as part of an assembly themselves<sup>80</sup>.

Citizens’ assemblies need to deliver defined recommendations or actions. They are not talking shops. Because of this they need to “dock in” with a council’s formal decision-making processes – hence our decision to recommend a standing citizens’ assembly in Newham.

The Commission recommends the establishment of a standing or permanent citizens’ assembly for Newham, to meet a minimum of twice a year. The citizens’ assembly

would respond to and act on important, emerging local issues. Its membership should be selected by sortition and a proportion should rotate each year. This assembly would select issues to deliberate upon and initiate policy agendas for the Council. It would lock directly into the council’s formal decision-making systems, both through the scrutiny function (in terms of alignment of work programmes and support) and directly with the Mayor (by feeding into cabinet decision-making through changes to the council’s constitution).



<sup>80</sup> Evidence from Tim Hughes (Involve), First Evidence Hearing, 25 November 2019



# Section 5

Co-Production &  
Community Empowerment

# Co-Production & Community Empowerment

## CO-PRODUCTION: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Newham Borough Council currently makes extensive use of ‘co-production’ with its residents and users of services. It should now consolidate its knowledge and experience of co-production, and extend it’s use in master planning and regeneration.

### The Commission recommends that:

- **Newham evaluates its existing co-production efforts, with local people themselves, as part of a process that also maps local community assets, resources and experiences of working with the council.**
- **The council, as part of community asset mapping, understand how existing knowledge, skills and best practice can be appraised and pooled within the local authority. Officers and councillors should be offered training on the best methods of community engagement, and the council should build into its future plans a bias in favour of citizen involvement in master planning and co-production on regeneration, and the arts and cultural programmes that are funded by major redevelopment schemes.**
- **The “One Newham” partnership be seen as a primary vehicle for the council to engage with the voluntary and community sector to better understand the infrastructure support they need. There should also be a central unit in the council with a remit to disseminate knowledge and expertise within the authority for co-production and community engagement.**

## 5.1 CO-PRODUCTION

“Co-production is about public service organisations and citizens making better use of each other’s assets, resources and contributions to achieve better outcomes or improve efficiency” .

Citizen co-production of public services and outcomes is not new, but to be effective it needs to be integrated into the public value process which underpins public services. [The Governance International Public Value Model](#) shows that improvements to public outcomes not only stem from traditionally provided public services but also directly from the contributions of local communities through co-production and behaviour change.

The idea of co-production has now become more popular, but, at the same time the term is increasingly used in a fuzzy way to include all kinds of collaborative arrangements, even between organisations. Any definition of co-production should be co-produced with the local stakeholders involved to create a common understanding and language. We suggest that this happen as an integral part of the process of developing the statement on a “framework of participation” that we recommend above.

Our definition suggests that co-production is not a purpose in itself. Nobody could and should expect to co-produce all decisions and all services with all citizens at all times. However, citizen co-production can be a very effective strategy to improve public outcomes and/or efficiency if it is done well and it is appropriate. Furthermore, co-production adds to citizen participation as it includes not only citizen voice but also citizen action.

<sup>81</sup> Governance International (2020) Co-production star toolkit, <http://www.govint.org/our-services/co-production/> (Accessed 10 April 2020)

# Co-Production & Community Empowerment

## WHAT CO-PRODUCTION LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE: THE “FOUR CO’S”<sup>82</sup>

- **co-commissioning** - e.g. in South Ayrshire<sup>83</sup> care experienced young people work with service commissioners to identify what the Council and partners need to change to enable them to successfully manage a tenancy, from budgeting to cookery;
- **co-design** - e.g. in the Municipality of Lund in Sweden<sup>84</sup> older people and people with disabilities co-design individual goals based on personal outcomes with social care workers to support independent living;
- **co-delivery** - e.g. in Community Speedwatch schemes such as in Wiltshire<sup>85</sup> volunteers help the police to generate behaviour change; and
- **co-assessment** - e.g. the advice from the UK Youth Parliament<sup>86</sup> on how young people can review their schools.

This model of the Four Co's provides public service commissioners and providers with a range of different opportunities to bring citizens into public services and offers different roles to citizens, depending on their interests and capabilities. The Co-Production Vision of the London Borough of Newham<sup>87</sup> also includes all four Co's. Its Co-Production Forum in Adult Social Care brings 'experts by experience' into discussions and actions around important health and social care issues.

Our research shows that in most countries in Europe, the public sector has regarded co-production as an opportunity to involve citizens in the services and interventions in which the public sector is already engaged (what we might call the 'inside-out' thinking approach). This is, of course, welcome. However, it may mean that an alternative pathway, which might be even more transformative and successful, is being overlooked – namely, for the public sector to explore carefully how it could add value to all the activities which service users and communities are already undertaking in their daily lives (what we call the 'outside-in' approach). An interesting example comes from Dumfries and Galloway in Scotland, where a group of women recovering from cancer got together to run a support group and community event, uncovering a huge level of unmet need in their local community, which has now been recognised by the local health and social care services (see <http://www.govint.org/good-practice/case-studies/wigtownshire-women-and-cancer/>)

Effective co-production through citizen voice is about working together all the way through from the very start of projects, not just consultation at a later stage. A lot of the time – especially in regeneration – practice encourages the opposite approach to co-production: The assumption is made that external “experts” have to be brought in to “fix” a situation.

<sup>82</sup> See <https://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/news/housing-boost-for-care-experienced-young-people.aspx>

<sup>83</sup> See [https://www.esn-eu.org/sites/default/files/2B\\_Lena%20and%20Anna\\_Lund%20Municipality.pdf](https://www.esn-eu.org/sites/default/files/2B_Lena%20and%20Anna_Lund%20Municipality.pdf)

<sup>84</sup> See <http://www.govint.org/?id=490>

<sup>85</sup> See <https://www.byc.org.uk/uk/uk-youth-parliament>

<sup>86</sup> See <http://www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Review-Your-School-pack.pdf>

<sup>87</sup> See <https://adultsocialcare.newham.gov.uk/Pages/Our-Vision-for-Coproduction.aspx#feedback>

## Co-Production & Community Empowerment

Making co-production work is about community and council capacity as well as overcoming the organisation's cultural fear and anxiety over perceived risks.<sup>88</sup> In particular, effective community co-production implies the need to adopt distributed or relational concepts of leadership, not hierarchical leadership. This is because co-production processes are inherently emergent and reliant on a range of actors who may have both common and contrasting motivations, and have access to a range of different types of power, which differs from project to project<sup>89</sup>. Such a dynamic perspective implies that power relationships are fluent and change over time. In particular, depending on the context, co-producers will not always be able to make equal contributions - but they may be equally important contributions<sup>90</sup>.

Good co-production should have a low floor but a high ceiling – being easy to engage with, and allowing people to develop deep technical expertise if they have the interest and capacity to do so<sup>91</sup>. However, such technical expertise is not what we most need from citizens - it is even more important to harness the tacit knowledge of citizens which arises from their roles as 'experts by experience' in their communities and neighbourhoods and, of course, in their own lives. In order to make this happen, political leadership and statements of intent are important. Councils might fund posts to build capacity or otherwise invest in order to bring people together. A shared set of priorities makes for a more sophisticated relationship between local people and a council. There can be challenges in working with groups where the council/public relationship is more adversarial – people do have long memories and you have to work hard to overcome wariness. As part of this, councils need to recognise the power imbalance between them and local people – councils will need to change their mindset and their internal ways of working<sup>92</sup>.

### Existing co-production practice in Newham

There are areas of effective co-production work at the council, with some evidence of improved outcomes and efficiency arising from it. Co-production is particularly valuable in areas like adult social care and public health, for example. But outcomes are too rarely fed back directly to local people. More systemic evaluation is needed as part of a more ambitious process of rolling out co-production across the borough.

Newham first employed co-production in Adult Social Care from 2007 and Children's Services from 2010. Since 2012, it has formed an increasingly important part of Newham's strategy for public engagement and development of services. Five service areas have gained forums that apply co-production. These are:

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 2012 | Newham Co-Production Forum (Adults) – NCPF(A) |
| 2017 | Leisure Access Forum                          |
| 2017 | ASK (mental health) Forum                     |
| 2018 | Newham Homelessness Action Group              |
| 2018 | Custom House Regeneration Project             |

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<sup>88</sup> Evidence from Melissa Mean (Knowle West) and Daisy Froud (Bartlett School of Architecture), Second Evidence Hearing, 10 January 2020

<sup>89</sup> Schlappa, H., Yasmin, I. & Tatsuya, N. (2020). Relational leadership: An analytical lens for the exploration of co-production. In: Loeffler, E. and T. Bovaird (Eds.). The Palgrave Handbook on Co-Production of Public Services and Outcomes. London: Palgrave Macmillan (forthcoming).

<sup>90</sup> Loeffler, E. (2020). Co-Production of Public Services and Outcomes. London: Palgrave Macmillan (forthcoming).

<sup>91</sup> Evidence from Melissa Mean (Knowle West) and Daisy Froud (Bartlett School of Architecture), Second Evidence Hearing, 10 January 2020

<sup>92</sup> Ibid

## Co-Production & Community Empowerment

The NCPF(A) is the most active of the co-production forums. This group is co-chaired by the lead Councillor for Health and Adult Social Care and a user elected by the group. It comprises Council and Newham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) officers, stakeholders such as Healthwatch Newham and representatives from a range of user-led Newham-based community groups. These groups primary focus is on adult health and social care issues. Each group can be represented by two members at every bi-monthly meeting.

Members raise, discuss, and where appropriate make recommendations on issues. Officers and members then take up these issues in a range of Task Groups, which are co-ordinated by lead officers and facilitated by the Council's co-production service for adults.

Over the past eight years, the NCPF(A)'s initiatives have included disability access and equipment at sports and other facilities across the borough, accessible transport for London Stadium and The Olympic Park, the Blue Badge programme for both carers and care receivers, and a series of events.

However, co-production should not be limited to institutionalised forums and to 'citizen voice' – we need to acknowledge that many service users and local communities have assets, skills and resources to co-deliver public services and outcomes, not only to talk about them in initiatives of co-commissioning, co-design and co-assessment. In particular, there is a need to shift from 'inside out' co-production initiatives, which are initiated by the local council and seek to bring representatives of local communities into public forums. In the future we need to give much more weight towards 'outside-in' co-production, which implies building on community initiatives by adding the resources, skills and knowledge of public service organisations<sup>93</sup>. For example, in London young volunteers are setting up support groups to rally round to help those self-isolating<sup>94</sup>. This implies the need for local officers to spend more time in local communities – this is no longer an exclusive task for neighbourhood managers. Local

councillors have a highly important role to play as community connectors - but again they also will not have a complete picture of community assets, so need to become expert at tapping into the resources of local 'experts by experience'.

Local people cited to us concerns about a lack of co-production, with the wider community being involved only once decisions have been made about what approach the council will take. Local people in fact identified shortcomings in how the Commission itself was working – saying that the way that the Commission had been established did not demonstrate a commitment on the part of the council to genuinely work alongside local people in making decisions.

One person said, "there are so many events where people share their views and they are taken away – feels like starting a conversation that is already happening", and complained about having to "fit into council structures and vocabulary". People were also concerned about the way that the council works with its partners in the community, saying that relationships felt too transactional. Some people thought there was a lack of funding to support involvement in co-production.

The Commission were told that if action feels top down, when funding goes the co-production activity will as well – this presents challenges when dealing with projects which requiring ongoing revenue commitment to fund. The development of business plans and other activity to make local action sustainable forms an important part of the design process<sup>95</sup>.

**The Commission recommends that existing co-production efforts are meaningfully evaluated, with local people themselves, as part of a process that sees local community assets, resources and experiences mapped.**

Community asset mapping will make it clearer to the council, and local people, where there is a need for local support in order for local people to engage productively in co-production activity. It will also highlight where "transactional"

<sup>93</sup> Loeffler, E. (2020). Co-Production of Public Services and Outcomes. London: Palgrave Macmillan (forthcoming).

<sup>94</sup> O'Shea, J. (2020). Coronavirus: Volunteers rally round to help those self-isolating. BBC News 11 March 2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-51821470>.

<sup>95</sup> Appendix, Public Engagement Findings



## Co-Production & Community Empowerment

concerns – the problems that local people have in getting things in their local area done – act as a barrier to the building of relationships of trust, which might make co-production easier to pursue. However, the complaints made to the local council can valuably be used as an avenue for co-production by offering complainants the opportunity to become part of the solution and work with the local council to co-design and co-deliver new solutions to address key

issues which are at the heart of a many complaints. This approach has already been adopted by Offenbach Council close to Frankfurt<sup>96</sup> and in Rimini (see below).

Local people have clear expectations of what good co-production looks and feels like for them. Greater collaboration, a sense of being seen as an equal, and involvement through the process were all seen as important.

### CO-PRODUCTION: EXAMPLES FROM ELSEWHERE

#### **BARKING AND DAGENHAM (SOCIAL CARE)**

The area's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2019-23) was co-produced with local people. Through resident focus groups, local people developed a set of expectations for the services they would receive – these were developed into “I statements”, used as the core of the strategy's outcome framework. Some of these “I statements” were:

- I am provided with information about how best to nurse my child's health and development;
- I am supported to meet other parents into the community;
- I am supported to make healthy choices for me and my child;
- I feel my mental health conditions are treated with the same respect as my physical conditions without stigma;
- When I am diagnosed, my family and I know where to find community support services, including emotional support;
- When I am diagnosed, I am supported with the information about my condition I need to make decisions and choices.

These outcomes map to more detailed principles and commitments, which have themselves been used by partners to develop delivery plans. This is an example of local people setting the fundamentals on which a subsequent strategy is built, rather than being involved in the operational design of plans and services<sup>97</sup>.

<sup>96</sup> Birk, F. and Süßmann, S. (2013). ‘Adopt a Street’ in Offenbach: Turning complainers into co-producers. Governance International Case Study. <http://www.govint.org/good-practice/case-studies/adopt-a-street-in-offenbach/>.

<sup>97</sup> London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (2019), Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-23, <https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Joint-Health-and-Wellbeing-Strategy-2019-2023.pdf> (Accessed 3 April 2020)

## RIMINI – IMPROVING GREEN SPACES AT NEIGHBOURHOOD LEVEL

Rimini is a very popular tourist destination for beach lovers located on the Adriatic sea. It is also the home of 150,000 citizens – and one of them became very dissatisfied with the state of a park near his home and decided to take action to clean it up. This grassroots initiative developed into the city-wide co-production programme CI.VI.VO. of Rimini Council.

Rimini Council promotes the engagement of citizens through its website, a Facebook page, and local press releases, as well as publicly visible road signs which inform residents that the specific space is being maintained by CI.VI.VO. volunteers. Two full time staff members of the CI.VI.VO. Office and one manager (who is also responsible for other issues) provide support to citizens who wish to set up a new group. In particular, they provide information when co-ordinators ask for it, and help them to co-ordinate CI.VI.VO. activities and projects with local public services. Most importantly, the co-ordinator and members of CI.VI.VO. group are covered by an insurance policy provided by the Municipality of Rimini.

By 2016, CI.VI.VO. groups have been set up in almost all neighbourhoods of Rimini. The volunteers also have a say on how to improve the built environment and are consulted by the CI.VI.VO. Office. In these and many other ways, the experience of the volunteers is valued and used to improve public spaces.

Source: Artuso and Montini (2016), Governance International Case Study, <http://www.govint.org/good-practice/case-studies/civivo-in-rimini-how-volunteers-make-their-neighbourhood-a-better-place-to-live/#c4701>.

## 5.2 USE OF CO-PRODUCTION IN REGENERATION

Co-production has a particular strength when it comes to regeneration and master planning. The traditional approach to consultation is increasingly unfit for purpose. Residents are particularly concerned to have greater say in large scale regeneration, estate renewal schemes and housing developments in the borough. The council should be guided by a 'participatory planning' approach which values the expertise, creativity and democratic voice of local residents in urban development.

Council activity on regeneration has to be anchored in a sense of what – and who - regeneration (especially large-scale regeneration) is for. Is the focus on economic growth and "gross value added" (GVA) or are our objectives more nuanced?

# Co-Production & Community Empowerment

## “INCLUSIVE GROWTH” AS A FRAMING DEVICE

The West Midlands Combined Authority is driven by the concept of “inclusive growth” (<https://www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/public-service-reform/inclusive-growth-unit/>). Inclusive growth is:

Enabling as many people as possible to contribute and benefit from growth – socially, benefitting people across the labour market spectrum, including groups that face particularly high barriers to high equality employment – and place based, addressing inequalities in opportunities between different parts of the country and within economic geographies.<sup>98</sup>

The phrase “inclusive growth” benefits from constructive ambiguity – ultimately it is about getting people to define themselves what benefits they see arising from economic growth, rather than focusing on Gross Value Added (GVA) or Gross Domestic Product (GDP)<sup>99</sup>.

A number of specific issues were brought up in the course of our evidence gathering that have relevance to regeneration.

Given the importance of the issue for Newham at the moment we wanted to look particularly at the implications for governance of regeneration. Some of the principal issues raised in respect of this issue are:

- Regeneration poses particular challenges and opportunities for governance. Developers and others should be encouraged to integrate governance into their plans at the design stage, to better understand community need and to ensure regeneration is carried out in a way that reflects broader social aims;
- Generally, co-production and participation are good ways for people to work through potential solutions;
- Formal planning processes (and master planning processes) are not currently designed in a way that encourages dialogue and discussion – they are focused on the tension between local people’s needs and developers’ objectives and professional opinion, the latter of which often trumps the former.

There are at least two forms in which regeneration happens, and is happening in Newham:

- Estate renewal. This may be typified through improvements to public realm, construction of infill housing, and improvements to heating and support systems within an existing estate. These schemes can be controversial. An infill scheme in Lewisham is currently causing significant contention as it proposes to take land currently used as a park as a “meanwhile” use. Elsewhere in South London, plans for estate renewal on the Aylesbury Estate ended up resulting in larger scale regeneration when it emerged that it would be technically impossible to upgrade the heating system, which was encased in structural concrete;
- Larger scale regeneration. At the smaller end of the scale this may look like estate renewal; at the larger end it can be the largest scale redevelopments such as Barking Riverside or the new residential portions of the former Olympic Village. In central London this can happen on constrained sites, such as the former Middlesex Hospital and Earl’s Court. Regeneration can also be about shifting uses from retail and light industrial, densifying in the process, as on the Old Kent Road.

<sup>98</sup> RSA, “Report of the inclusive growth commission” (2017). Accessed 15 November 2019 at [https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/rsa\\_inclusive-growth-commission-final-report-march-2017.pdf](https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/rsa_inclusive-growth-commission-final-report-march-2017.pdf)

<sup>99</sup> Evidence from Claire Spencer (WMCA), Second Evidence Hearing, 10 January 2020

## Co-Production & Community Empowerment

### REGENERATION CO-PRODUCTION IN MANNHEIM COUNCIL, GERMANY

Mannheim is an industrial city of about 300,000 people in the state of Baden-Württemberg in Germany. With a history of migration, hosting refugees and engaging with the differences in its population are part of how Mannheim works. Its diversity is shaping the way it plans its outcomes and strategies for action.

Mannheim has over 500ha of former US Military barracks, which it rebuilt, with co-production at the heart. The comprehensive regeneration process was managed by an arms-length local Development Company. The directly elected Mayor, Dr. Kurz, has committed to an outcomes framework, where all of the public services are aligned in their intent, actions and resourcing to improving agreed outcomes in the city. This vision is underpinned by a commitment to engaging citizens and multiple opportunities for participation. The clear intent is to move from a model of citizen as consumer to citizen as participant.

This governance clarity around intent is reflected in the process being adopted in the regeneration process. The Mayor met with people in the neighbourhood and in city café spaces to discuss and experiment with the possibilities, and this produced '1000 ideas' which informed outcomes and ambitions listed in the first 'White Book' in 2012.

Furthermore, the local council trained citizens to act as 'Future Facilitators', and peers in the regeneration process. The Development Company also provided experimental spaces, programmes and activities with citizens, artists and groups to co-design new possibilities and to build new allegiance with new communities.

After each phase of co-production and wider public participation the local council published the results and its commitments in a 'White Book' to provide accountability to local people. At the end of the five-year regeneration process the fourth and final White Book was published, which provided an internal assessment of the lessons learnt and results achieved as well as and outlined the next steps of citizen engagement in the new neighbourhoods.

Source: [https://www.ads.org.uk/coproducing\\_citizens/](https://www.ads.org.uk/coproducing_citizens/) and <https://www.konversion-mannheim.de/>

### GERMANY



# Co-Production & Community Empowerment

## REGENERATION CO-PRODUCTION IN NEWHAM

### Shape Newham

Shape Newham was introduced to allow a more participatory approach with residents on decisions relating to urban development. It will see 18 creative enhancements to eight town centres across the borough with a £1.5million capital investment in Newham's public spaces. Launched by Mayor Fiaz, an assembly-style process began in September 2019 to allow communities to shape the scope of each enhancement project.

The eight town centres were split into three regions, with three assemblies in each region between September and December 2019, deliberating on issues such as preferences for the location of each enhancement and priorities for the enhancement to address. Around 20 to 45 residents attended each assembly.

In December 2019 three residents from each region also joined council officers and art experts to create resident-led interview panels that would select the artists and designers that would work on the Shape Newham project. Currently between January and March 2020, eight residents from each region are joining council officers on design committees, to review the development of the designs and ensure they are developed in line with community preferences expressed in the assemblies.

### Carpenters Estate

The Carpenters Estate has the well-established Carpenters Destination Steering Group (CDSG) which is representative of the households living on the estate and those with the right to return. The CDSG works with the Council, Red Door Ventures and the resident-appointed Independent Tenants' & Residents' Advisor to ensure that residents have opportunities to influence and shape the future of their estate.

Over the summer, a number of resident workshops were held to look at the different options for restoring the estate, and the viability of each option is currently being explored.

The Council are continuing to engage with residents through targeted events for specific client groups to understand their requirements, such as leaseholders and freeholders, and the 55-year-old and over community.

Residents have also worked with the Council via the CDSG to agree a definition for co-design:

*"Valuing the skills, knowledge and experience brought by the people living in our communities, based on the principle that those living in our homes are central to influencing place-making. By working with those who have technical and professional expertise, together we can restore a neighbourhood that will provide homes we can all be proud of for current and future generations".*

## Co-Production & Community Empowerment

We think that there are particular opportunities to do more with the local community with regard to the regeneration of the Royal Docks. The area comprises the Royal Docks Enterprise Zone<sup>100</sup> (which is London's only Enterprise Zone) and the wider Royal Docks and Beckton Riverside Opportunity Area – taken together, plans are for the creation of tens of thousands of new homes and jobs.

This is a twenty-year programme of work; it is anticipated that by 2036/37 total investment will reach £8 billion. A joint delivery team comprising the Mayor of London, the Mayor of Newham and Local Economic Action Partnership are developing the overall masterplan; a Good Growth Fund will shortly see a number of funding streams launched to support local individuals and businesses to see benefits from the regeneration activity.

We think that the council – and its partners – could use the scale and nature of the Royal Docks regeneration to act as a test bed for genuinely radical approaches to innovation when it comes to co-producing solutions and approaches to the urban landscape which make the exercise meaningful and empowering for local people. The opportunity for transformative change here is significant if some of those practices and approaches were to be scaled up. The regeneration plans include a comprehensive programme of cultural and community activities. The large scale and long timeframe of this project lends itself to unique and innovative approaches. Newham should challenge its partners to develop the current plans for community and cultural activities – and for the use of the Growth Fund – into something led by local people and their needs.

### 5.3 BUILDING UP THE SKILLS AND CAPACITY WITHIN THE COUNCIL AND COMMUNITY ON CO-PRODUCTION

The council has significant experience and expertise on co-production, as we have already noted. But more needs to be done to ensure that working alongside local people happens with the right set of expectations. The Council might expect

too much, too soon – local people might expect a kind of engagement that the council may not yet be ready to provide. A better sense of mutual expectations – and mutual capacity – to work together needs to come first.

This does not need to come as part of a lengthy “scoping” or framing exercise. Further experimentation on co-production can build on what the council does, but can be designed to tease out where skills or capacity needs exist, both within the council and the local community. Steps can then be taken by those involved to address those imbalances.

Part of this can also be carried out by way of community asset mapping exercises. As the council seeks to better understand the communities it serves, there are two forms of community assets that it can seek to understand better – usually with the help of local people.

The first of these are physical assets – sites, spaces and buildings. Some of these might be used formally by the community, but there are some uses which might be less formal, or less well known. Private businesses and private spaces might provide some of this function. It is this physical infrastructure to which the phrase “community assets” often refers, and provisions exist in the Localism Act 2011 to secure protection for such assets which might be under threat. This is why accurate mapping is so important. The second set of assets are those which are less tangible – the capacity and resilience of the local community and the skills held by individuals and groups within that community. The more that the council – and the community – understands about these assets, the better able it will be to provide support. It will also mean that the council does not hold expectations of the local community which are unrealistic.

**The Commission recommends that the council, as part of community asset mapping, understand how existing knowledge, skills and best practice can be appraised and pooled within the local authority. Officers and councillors should be offered training on the best methods of community engagement, and the council**

<sup>100</sup> These are areas designated by Government which receive tax breaks and investment support, to promote and encourage regeneration and new business



## Co-Production & Community Empowerment

**should build into its future plans a bias in favour of citizen involvement in master planning, and co-production on regeneration, and the arts and cultural programmes that are funded by major redevelopment schemes.**

The Commission recommends that the council should develop its approach to co-production by “learning through doing” – experimenting with different approaches, seeing what works and adopting permanently the most effective approaches.

### 5.4 EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES, AND WORKING WITH THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

A healthy democracy rests on a strong civil society. People learn the skills and habits of citizenship in their communities. Participation in community organisations, coupled with community organising, enables people to come together to articulate their concerns and mobilise their demands into the formal structures of representative democracy. Community groups can also play a vital role in service delivery – for example, in the expanding fields of social prescribing and action on public health.

Historically, Newham has not grant funded community infrastructure bodies. The council benefits from an excellent team of community managers, but its approach is still too municipal. There are important organisations in the community – such as TELCO and Newham Citizens – for organising local residents. ‘One Newham’ has been created to act as an umbrella body for the local voluntary and community sector. More can be done to support these developments and to engage on an on-going basis with community organisations.

**The Commission recommends that the “One Newham” partnership be seen as a primary vehicle for the council to engage with the voluntary and community sector to better understand the infrastructure support they need. There should also be a central unit in the council with a remit to disseminate knowledge and expertise within the authority for co-production and community engagement. Community organisations should become valued partners in regeneration, planning, and the arts and culture, as well as co-producers in major service areas.**





# Section

Democracy, Data  
& Innovation

# Democracy, Data & Innovation

## DEMOCRATIC, DATA AND INNOVATION: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Data infrastructures and digital services are now ubiquitous in local government, and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) is expanding rapidly in public services. But different ways of collecting, storing and using data are available to public authorities, and these can be more or less open, democratic and privacy-respecting. In Newham, the opportunity exists to follow those city and local governments that use data and digital tools to promote democracy, innovation in services and local economic activity, and transparent, accountable political leadership.

**The Commission recommends the creation of a Mayor's Office for Data, Discovery and Democracy – or 'O3D' for short – to integrate open data and data analytics, user-led policy R & D, and expertise in the tools and techniques of co-production and community participation.**

**The Commission recommends that the council extends its use of the “mixed reality” of online deliberation and consensus forming with more traditional engagement on a focused and specific issue of local concern, to see what works.** Expertise should be sought from places where these democratic innovations have been pioneered, such as Taiwan, Spain, Iceland and elsewhere. This can be fed into wider planning for co-production, and area governance.

### 6.1 AN “OFFICE FOR DATA, DISCOVERY AND DEMOCRACY”

Democratising data and “official” information are one of the most important ways of developing a more democratic local space. Co-production and more collaborative methods of policymaking need data and evidence to inform and support work – bringing ‘collective intelligence’ to bear. Newham has expressed a political objective of becoming more open and transparent, and having a more consistent and coherent approach to the production and publication of official data will also help local people and partners to understand how the council is meeting its obligations under the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012.

Around the world, local and city authorities increasingly integrate their data and data analytical capabilities with research and policy design functions. They use open data, the creation of data infrastructures, and participatory and deliberative digital platforms, to engage citizens in co-producing policy and designing and developing new services.

This data can take many forms. Some of its will be service- use data, demographic data, and information to support demand management – the traditional kind of performance management information that councils in England has been using for nearly thirty years. But some will be more qualitative. Feedback from local people – including through ward councillors, who can play a crucial role in aggregating information and identifying patterns in their localities – can be a particularly rich source. Feedback from complaints – ensuring that the learning from such complaints is properly understood to prevent failures from happening in future – is particularly beneficial.

There are a range of national and international examples of councils using “innovation centres” to develop a keener understanding of their place, and to direct action and resources<sup>101</sup>.

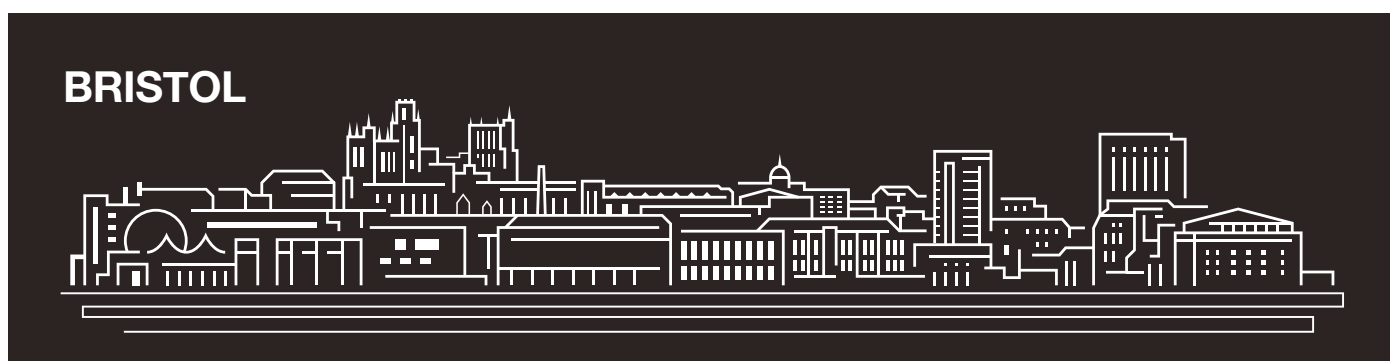
<sup>101</sup> Raikes, L (2017). England's New Leaders: How mayors can transform their cities, IPPR, Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/research/publications/englands-new-leaders-how-mayors-can-transform-their-cities> [Accessed 10 Oct. 2019]

## Democracy, Data & Innovation



**Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics, Boston.** Set up in 2010, MONUM aims to improve the quality of Bostonians' lives by involving them in participatory civic engagement, seeking to encourage greater civic engagement by employing the use of innovation and experimentation. MONUM works on projects across the city's departments, including housing and education. It chooses experiments based on their ability to be prototyped, scaled and have a positive impact on its citizens. But importantly, before a project is chosen, it is researched and evaluated through social network incubators – a cross-departmental group of 15-20 city employees. MONUM has worked across city departments such as housing, education, civic engagement, racial inequality, city infrastructure.

**One City Office, Bristol.** The One City Approach brings a wide range of public, private and third sector partners together to work together to create a 'fair, healthy and sustainable city'. The Bristol City Office provides a space for these partners to convene and has led the production of the 'One City Plan', which was developed and coproduced through collaborative working with city partners and sets out the city's key challenges up to 2050 and a shared vision for how to approach these. The One City Plan is a methodology for focusing on, and delivering long-term change, and is built on six key themes: connectivity, economy, environment, health and wellbeing, homes and communities, and learning and skills. In collaboration with Bristol City Council's Innovation Team, the City Office has produced a 'One City Dashboard' which is a user-friendly webpage that lays out the One City Goals. Each year, three goals are chosen as the priority for the City Office to focus on during that year.

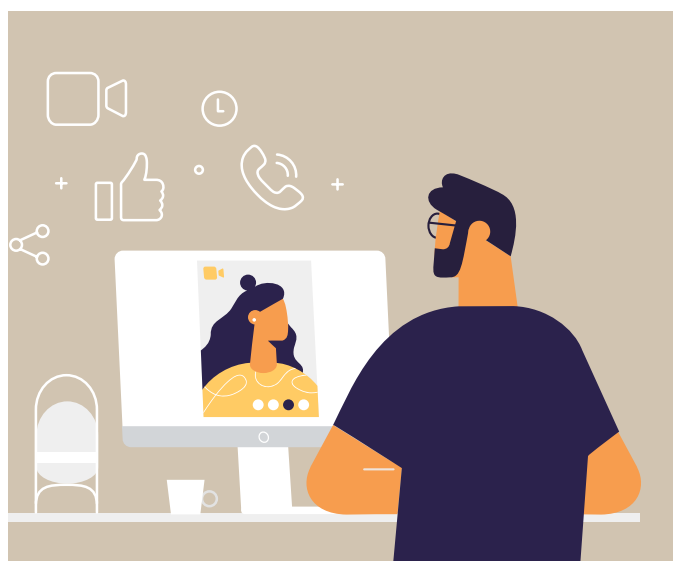


# Democracy, Data & Innovation

Newham needs a way to draw together information and data in order to use it more efficiently and democratically. This is not just about “big data”, as when officials draw information into a data warehouse and use it themselves to refine and support their own work. It is about democratising what is gathered by opening it up to others, taking advantage of collective intelligence to better understand how the council and its partners can best support local people. Like many other cities and local authorities, Newham should continue to open up its data, and integrate its capabilities for data analytics, policy research and design, user-engagement, and service innovation.

**The Commission recommends the creation of a Mayor’s Office for Data, Discovery and Democracy – or ‘O3D’ for short – to integrate open data and data analytics, user-led policy R & D, and expertise in the tools and techniques of co-production and community participation.**

The Commission recommends that the O3D and the council assertively develop partnerships with local universities and other research groups, taking advantage of the opportunity to draw in research funding from elsewhere to support a step-change in the use of data and citizen engagement in the governance of the borough. The arrival of UCL East provide clear opportunities here.



## 6.2 DIGITAL DEMOCRACY

Everywhere faces challenges on digital democracy – using technology to increase turnout, interest and participation in politics. With a young population, Newham should make it a priority to understand how young people in particular (as the demographic least likely to vote) engage and participate in local democracy in order to try to effect change.

Some of this work will involve integrating an understanding of digital needs and engagement into the “framework of participation” we recommended above. Some will involve building this understanding into the council’s formal governance systems.

This is about pushing power downwards, and democratising systems in order to develop and make decisions. Distributed decision-making, and affordable deliberation and co-production, will be easier with a more ambitious approach to digital democracy. The O3D can lead on these endeavours with the council’s support.

“Digital democracy” has to be woven into an environment where public bodies also recognise the centrality of face to face dialogue. This is not about shifting debate into exclusively digital channels (or assuming that digital tools will solve everything) but recognising that those digital spaces are where an increasing number of people are, and that the council and elected representatives need to be more visible in these spaces.<sup>102</sup> The council currently uses Pol.is, a digital tool, to involve and engage local people. Pol.is is the same tool used for mass deliberation in Taiwan. The council needs to experiment more here – to understand what systems and approaches will work, and to feed them into wider strategies around co-production and governance.

<sup>102</sup> Evidence from Graham Smith (University of Westminster), First Evidence Hearing, 25 November 2019

# Democracy, Data & Innovation

## DIGITAL DEMOCRACY: TAIWAN

Taiwan is a relatively young democracy, having emerged fully into pluralistic, multi-party elections in the 1990s. In the early 2010s, community tension grew around steps taken to engage with the People's Republic of China. In response, Government embarked on an ambitious process to reinvent the way that the Government engaged with its citizens, with digital democracy at its heart.

The result was the “vTaiwan” process, designed to provide a neutral platform in which diverse opinion groups can come together to build consensus. The process has several stages:

- Objective: crowdsourcing facts and evidence;
- Reflective: mass deliberation, using the Pol.is platform, to develop a general consensus on the issue;
- Livestreamed meeting: a smaller group is drawn together to meet online and develop more detailed recommendations.

The conversation is facilitated by people who also produce summaries and transcripts of discussions, helping others to become involved and assisting in the overall transparency of the process.



Local people, and councillors, have a range of expectations on digital democracy and participation. Unsurprisingly there is a degree of caution, particularly that those less technologically able will be left behind. Local people thought that surveys, polls, online forms and webchats were effective digital tools for the council to use to understand local people's needs more, but also thought that the council could do more to use social media, especially local Facebook groups. It was suggested by some local people that the council could use webinars to explain its work better, and could livestream more formal and public meetings – but this sits in the context of those who, as we noted above, have concerns that the presumption in favour of digital tools over others might exclude some people. A number of these

things are already practiced by Newham; local people, and we, think that the council could do more to advertise the various ways it uses digital tools both to broadcast about its work and to actively engage people.

There has been a tendency across the public sector to focus on digital services in service of the technology itself rather than on user need. In the early 2010s a proliferation of apps derived from the sense from public bodies that they needed to create their own, controllable platforms to facilitate both community dialogue and to gather insights on local people's needs. More recently, this approach has shifted, but there is still very limited insight within many bodies (councils especially) about digital technology and what it can achieve.



# Democracy, Data & Innovation

The establishment of the UK Government Digital Service (GDS) was driven by an understanding that digital transformation required a transformation in working culture as much as just the adoption of new technologies. The development of a similar understanding in local government has been slower – a prominent example of efforts to effect a similar culture change is the Croydon Digital Service.<sup>103</sup>

## EXPLANATION OF CULTURAL APPROACH BEHIND GDS / CDS

The “Digital Service” model bring together ICT and public policy to better understand and act on how technology can facilitate the relationship between people and the state.

In national government, the Government Digital Service was established in 2011. It has been based on two principles. Firstly, the need to move to “digital by default” for the provision of key public services (an evolution of the approach adopted by many public bodies in earlier years which aimed to migrate people from face-to-face and phone interactions to online services). Secondly, the idea that government is a “platform”<sup>104</sup>. This is about the single site GOV.UK being used to provide a common platform for a host of other services and offers from Government to local people. In theory, this assures a seamless experience for citizens – an approach whereby the relationship and interactions they can have with Government is consistent and clear. In practice, the rollout of GOV.UK (and in particular “Verify”, the product aimed at providing a common sign-in and identity service across Government) has proved technically complex.

Similar principles have governed approaches to digital services in local government. In Croydon, a comprehensive digital strategy aims to bring a different design and delivery ethos to the way that digital tools are used. Its outcomes are that:

- Croydon residents will have a radically better experience when accessing the council's services and information, with an easy-to-use website that works on any device, digital services so good and convenient that people prefer to use them when they can, and digital communications which inform and consult them on the issues they care about
- Croydon residents will also have access to an enhanced digital skills offer, helping them build their confidence in areas from basic computer literacy through to the professional skills they need to access the jobs of the future
- Croydon residents, visitors, students and businesses will enjoy faster broadband connectivity and a digitally enhanced public realm, through initiatives including public WiFi, digital wayfinding information, apps that bring the community together, and smart technology solutions that help reduce energy consumption, lower emissions, improve public safety and help make Croydon a more attractive place to be
- Croydon will have a thriving digital business sector, with start-ups, scale-ups and established businesses creating growth and prosperity, working together as a cooperative ecosystem, and helping to change perceptions of Croydon as we become more widely recognised a leading destination for tech
- Croydon council staff will have access to continuously improving technology and have the skills and confidence to use it well, helping them deliver great services to residents as efficiently as possible and freeing up more of their time for frontline services
- Partner organisations will be able to work with the council and with each other more effectively, supported by digital collaboration tools and more open communications, and making use of shared data and digital platforms to enable a more joined-up, system-wide approach to delivering positive change in Croydon<sup>105</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Croydon Council, “Croydon Digital Strategy 2019-24” (2019). Accessed 15 November 2019 at <https://www.croydon.gov.uk/democracy/dande/policies/digital-strategy-2019-2024/strategy-overview>

<sup>104</sup> Government Service Design Manual, <https://github.com/alphagov/government-service-design-manual/blob/5fd91aa8aeb41eefbbd35149eea50fe2e2536d80/service-manual/technology/government-as-a-platform.md> (Accessed 2 April 2020)

<sup>105</sup> Croydon Council (2019), Digital Strategy 2019-24, <https://www.croydon.gov.uk/democracy/dande/policies/digital-strategy-2019-2024/strategy-overview> (Accessed 2 April 2020)

# Democracy, Data & Innovation

Newham is a signatory to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Local Digital Declaration. We think that reflecting on these commitments and what they mean in practice will help the council to develop its current practice, attitudes and approach.

## LOCAL DIGITAL DECLARATION: KEY PRINCIPLES

1. We will go even further to redesign our services around the needs of the people using them. This means continuing to prioritise citizen and user needs above professional, organisational and technological silos.
2. We will 'fix our plumbing' to break our dependence on inflexible and expensive technology that doesn't join up effectively. This means insisting on modular building blocks for the IT we rely on, and open standards to give a common structure to the data we create.
3. We will design safe, secure and useful ways of sharing information to build trust among our partners and citizens, to better support the most vulnerable members of our communities, and to target our resources more effectively.
4. We will demonstrate digital leadership, creating the conditions for genuine organisational transformation to happen, and challenging all those we work with to embrace this Local Digital Declaration.
5. We will embed an open culture that values, incentivises and expects digital ways of working from every member of our workforce. This means working in the open wherever we can, sharing our plans and experience, working collaboratively with other organisations, and reusing good practice.

MHCLG has established support arrangements to assist public bodies in meeting these aspirations<sup>106</sup>.

As with wider approaches to participation, digital democracy is a part of a more general digital transformation within a council. This is about:

- Clear planning;
- Having the right support in place;
- Choosing the right tools<sup>107</sup>.

As with participation, it is tempting to start talking about tools and ways of working first – discussing the mechanics of digital democracy before addressing more systemic problems. The detail is more tangible, but the prerequisites of planning and support are more important. Accessibility and equality form an important part of this, as we have highlighted on participation more generally. Accessibility is the foundation to effective digital engagement (wider equality, accessibility and inclusion issues are discussed in more detail in the sections above), and the coronavirus crisis has stimulated a shift to ensuring universal access to on-line services. It is necessary to build for the 1% who may be excluded first<sup>108</sup>. Participatory approaches ask a lot and have high barriers for entry in terms of confidence. By doing things online you exclude about 10% of the population, but not doing things online also now excludes – and online is significantly cheaper. If you can do most of your engagement through online tools it frees up more resource to focus more expensive, offline activity where it needs to happen. Digital technologies are not the only answer but can be leveraged to slightly improve things. "Online" does not necessarily reinforce the old social divides.

<sup>106</sup> More details at <https://localdigital.gov.uk/declaration/>

<sup>107</sup> Nesta (2017), Digital democracy: the tools transforming political engagement: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/digital-democracy-the-tools-transforming-political-engagement/> (Accessed 2 April 2020)

<sup>108</sup> Evidence from Ben Fowkes (Delib), First Evidence Hearing, 25 November 2019

# Democracy, Data & Innovation

## NESTA TYPOLOGY FOR DIGITAL DEMOCRACY

- Informing citizens – using technology to bring more information to local people;
- Issue framing – using things like petition sites to raise awareness of particular issues and set the agenda for debate;
- Citizens providing information – citizen generated data (using insights collected from platforms such as Commonplace, for example);
- Citizens providing ideas – ideas banks, competitions, and other ways to benefit from the expertise of local people and their contextual knowledge of complex local problems;
- Citizens providing technical expertise
- Deliberation – one of the issues that the Commission will be looking into further, typified by online forums and debating platforms;
- Citizens developing proposals – working together to collaborate on documents and plans.
- Citizens scrutinising proposals
- Citizens making decisions – such as through referendums or participatory budgeting;
- Citizens monitoring and assessing public actions and services through the use of open data, and similar.

## BARCELONA



### Talk London

This is a consultation and engagement platform run by the Mayor of London and GLA. Any Londoner over the age of 16 can join the platform and contribute. Moderators pose general questions about life in London to elicit responses; the Mayor also uses Talk London to consult on specific plans and proposals, like the Mayoral Budget and the cultural strategy (two recent topics for discussion).

### Decidim (Barcelona and elsewhere)

Decidim is an open-source digital platform for citizen participation. The platform was created for the city of Barcelona. It can be used by governments to work with local people to assess priorities for investment, or to deliberate on policy solutions – it can also be used to track the implementation of decisions. It can be used for self-organising groups of local people to support advocacy and activism.

### Pol.is (Taiwan and elsewhere)

Use to support the vTaiwan initiative (as discussed in section 6.2) and in other parts of the world, Pol.is is a platform designed to facilitate large-scale conversations while ensuring that “minority” opinions are still recognised and promoted.

**The Commission recommends that the council extends its use of the “mixed reality” of online deliberation and consensus forming with more traditional engagement on a focused and specific issue of local concern, to see what works.** Expertise should be sought from places where these democratic innovations have been pioneered, such as Taiwan, Spain, Iceland and elsewhere. This can be fed into wider planning for co-production, and area governance.



# Section

Local Democracy  
and Political Inequality

# Local Democracy and Political Inequality

## LOCAL DEMOCRACY & POLITICAL INEQUALITY: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Local democracy in England is marked by many of the same political inequalities that characterise Westminster democracy. Young people and those from the lowest income backgrounds are less likely to be registered to vote and to turnout at elections. Class, race, ethnicity and age are important determinants of political engagement and the exercise of power. At a local level, the decline of local newspapers means that scrutiny of politics is particularly weak and opportunities for shared democratic debate more limited than in the past.

**The Commission recommends the establishment of a taskforce directly to identify those who are excluded or otherwise not engaged in formal representative democracy in Newham, and to set out a targeted approach to civic education on local democracy. This taskforce should work to the goals of increasing registration and voter turnout and supporting local action on political and civic education. The taskforce would work closely with the O3D to gather insight to support its work.**

**The Commission also supports experimenting with on-line voting and recommends that, should national government carry out pilots for online voting in the near future, the council should put itself forward.**

**The Commission recommends the creation of a cooperative, citizens' media organisation in Newham, funded in a start-up phase through an endowment. This would support independent journalism and enhanced democratic debate in the borough.**

## 7.1 ENGAGEMENT OVERALL

Turnout in elections is not dissimilar in Newham to other similar areas: in the London local elections of 2018, turnout was 38.8% in London overall, 35.8% in Newham, 29.5% in Barking & Dagenham, 37% in Brent, 36.1% in Greenwich, and 37.7% in Waltham Forest (boroughs with similar demographic profiles). As a young borough, it has lower rates of registration than elsewhere, however: 58.9% of the eligible population is registered in Newham, compared to 62% in Tower Hamlets, 63% in Barking & Dagenham, through to 67.5% in Waltham Forest, 68.85% in Redbridge and 75.25% in Havering. Class and other inequalities also determine levels of political participation.

In other parts of inner east London, high profile instances of voter fraud has shaken confidence in the local democratic system. The Commission believes that proposals to require citizens to show forms of ID in order to vote will depress turnout and worsen political inequality in Newham. However, it recognises that it is not in the council's gift to take the kind of radical action that would make a significant difference here, such as automatic registration to vote, mandatory voting or proportional representation. The council's opportunities are constrained by national policy.

Part of the answer lies with more effective civic education, particularly (but not exclusively) for young people. In the councillor survey, most respondents felt that effective political education had to form an important part of plans to better engage and work with local people – although this is not an excuse for the council not to attempt to redesign its systems to be more approachable and accessible to local people. Local people themselves were eager to understand more about how the council worked and engage with it, despite frustration that it does not always engage with them in the way they need and expect.

## Local Democracy and Political Inequality

### COUNCILLORS' VIEWS ON POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Councillors had strong views on the use of political education and on the way that a wider range of people could be encouraged to stand for election.

“Hold information sessions, make selection rigorous but also provide training to candidates”

“I often think people only get involved when they see things going wrong. Most people are happy if they believe the services they get are relevant and well delivered. Council are often influenced by a small but vocal hyper-minority”

“Proportional representation would allow for a much more varied political scene in Newham. The problem with a majority system is it allows 40% of voters to elect all the councillors. There needs to be a much closer link between voting intention and representation on the council”

Engagement in local democracy needs to be addressed in Newham. In particular, there needs to be a specific effort to identify those demographic groups who tend not to vote<sup>109</sup>. Our own engagement activity had difficulty in drawing out the opinions of young professionals and people from an Eastern European background – not the groups that we might traditionally characterise as “hard to reach”. This may or may not map to lower levels of voting. The problem here is that no accurate local data exists on voting patterns for different ethnic and other groups in Newham, making targeted action difficult. We expect that, for those possessing protected characteristics under the Equality Act, various barriers to engagement in this key civic duty exists – but the paucity of local data and evidence makes it difficult to confirm this, and to know what to do about it.



<sup>109</sup> In the first instance, characterised by their possession of protected characteristics under the Equality Act, but also reflecting the way that communities of local people choose to identify and describe themselves.



## Local Democracy and Political Inequality

We took evidence on the need to spend time consistently engaging with people – on the doorstep and around where they live<sup>110</sup>. Putting a small amount of resource into this “relational” engagement over a sustained period of time is better than putting significant resource into formal engagement for short term initiatives, and means it will be easier to secure participation from a wider range of people. Using civic leadership – councillors and “community leaders” – is a way of engaging with active and committed people who may be able to feed back to other local people. Councillors responding to our survey suggested that this was a fundamental part of their role. This links clearly to the role of councillors, which we go on to discuss below.

### EXAMPLES OF INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO ENGAGE AND SPEAK TO THOSE TO WHOM COUNCILS MIGHT TRADITIONALLY FIND IT HARD TO LISTEN

- Young people (West Midlands Combined Authority Young Mayor). The selection for the Young Combined Authority was based on a deliberate bias towards groups not already represented on the main CA board<sup>111</sup>.
- Citizen research (WMCA). One approach that WMCA has adopted to “reach” people where they already are is to support people to become citizen researchers with academic research skills – such as through the EU-funded “Use It” project<sup>112</sup> in Birmingham. This can potentially get over the issues of distrust of professionals. Trusted intermediaries can help here, although they aren’t the only solution.

## 7.2 ENGAGING IN ELECTIONS AND THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

We noted trends in turnout and participation in elections in the introductory section. The conduct of elections is an area where the council has limited levers at its disposal. We could not, for example, recommend the introduction of mandatory voting – although academic evidence suggests that this is the measure which would (self-evidently) make the most significant impact to turnout<sup>113</sup>. That said, turnout – and turnout of groups traditionally disenfranchised – is a key measure of the effectiveness and vibrancy of local democracy. Increasing turnout should be a key priority for the council.

While the law around elections – the use of postal ballots, the setting up of polling stations – is set in legislation, there is wider activity that could help here. The publication of manifestos and other information in accessible formats is one approach<sup>114</sup>. Section 17A of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 provides for the publication by the Greater London returning officer of a booklet of election addresses, which is sent to all electors – taking the opportunity to develop something similar for Newham local elections might provide a good opportunity to encourage participation. We agree with witnesses who told us that the creation of unbiased resources to support people to understand the electoral process, and their choices, is vital<sup>115</sup>.

For disabled people, access problems are even more acute. Existing measures – Braille ballot paper templates and the use of temporary doorbells to aid physical access to polling stations – are often inappropriate and take away agency. The same shortcomings apply to proxy voting or direct assistance from poll staff at the polling station. For many, postal voting is the only feasible option. Local people told us about some of their concerns with the accessibility of the voting process.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Evidence from Graham Smith (University of Westminster), First Evidence Hearing, 25 November 2019

<sup>111</sup> Evidence from Claire Spencer (WMCA), First Evidence Hearing, 25 November 2019

<sup>112</sup> <https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/birmingham>

<sup>113</sup> Birch, S (2014) Addressing turnout inequality, (Political Studies Association blogpost), <https://www.psa.ac.uk/insight-plus/blog/addressing-turnout-inequality> (Accessed 10 April 2020)

<sup>114</sup> Evidence from Areeq Chowdhury (WebRoots Democracy), Second Evidence Hearing, 10 January 2020

<sup>115</sup> Evidence from Rachael Farrington (Voting Counts), Second Evidence Hearing, 10 January 2020

<sup>116</sup> Appendix A, Public Engagement Findings

## Local Democracy and Political Inequality

We agree with those witnesses who are keen to see the piloting of online voting. We know that like postal voting, online voting has been criticised as offering the potential for pressure to be exerted on people within their family and peer groups to vote in a certain way, not to mention the possibility of technological disruption. We know that the arguments in favour of online voting are finely balanced, and that the experience of pilots and trials around the world have been mixed. A number of commentators have argued strongly against further piloting, stating that problems around the verification of votes, and the security of the ballot overall, cannot be overcome.<sup>117</sup>

But the demographic context for boroughs such as Newham is distinct and unique, and people's expectations around online availability of services is very different to those which applied when UK piloting was carried out nearly twenty years ago. We think that it is worth revisiting the issue, as and when the national policy context allows for it.

A pilot, if approved by the Cabinet Office would provide the opportunity to test on-line voting in a safe, planned way. We would expect to see a pilot or trial engage with the argument that such an option – alongside traditional voting – would increase turnout, and that it would (in due course) be cheaper to administer.



<sup>117</sup> Open Rights Group (2007). Election Reports 2007. <https://www.openrightsgroup.org/blog/org-election-report-highlights-problems-with-voting-technology-used/> (Accessed 3 July 2020). It should be noted that this report is based on observations made in respect of online voting pilots which, it is noted below, were procedurally and methodologically flawed.

# Local Democracy and Political Inequality

## ONLINE AND ELECTRONIC VOTING

“Online” and “electronic” voting are not the same thing. Electronic voting has been a feature of many elections around the world; usually the term is used to describe a process by which people still physically attend a polling place but their vote is recorded, and subsequently counted, electronically.<sup>118</sup> Online voting is where no physical presence is required and is far less common.

### Outcomes from early 2000s online voting pilots

In 2002 and 2003, the UK Government sought volunteers from local government to participate in piloting for “e-voting”. At the time, the intention was that Government would roll out e-voting across elections by the end of the decade; the idea was that piloting would allow for a range of technical approaches to be trialled, and for barriers to implementation to be identified and overcome. Joint Government and local government sector research set out a baseline understanding of what those barriers were likely to be, and the criteria which would need to be met for e-voting to be considered a success.<sup>119</sup>

A sizeable number of authorities took part, although there was a degree of scepticism from election professionals about the benefits of the exercise in terms of workload and impact<sup>120</sup>. The pilots were evaluated by Government and the Electoral Commission. After initial enthusiasm there was lessened interest in taking plans forward. A second round of pilots was pursued in 2007, but these were of a methodologically poor quality and no clear conclusions on effectiveness or impact can be taken from them<sup>121</sup>.

Although reports from individual pilots were published in 2002, 2003 and 2007, no systematic conclusions or action plans from the online voting pilots were established or acted on. From 2007 onwards Government essentially abandoned plans to take online voting forward as a policy objective.

### Lithuania

Lithuania announced plans to introduce online voting in 2018, but abandoned those plans in 2019 because of growing fears over cybersecurity across the country and the economy. The Government stated its intention to return to the issue if more effective security arrangements could be made.

### Switzerland

Switzerland has introduced and adopted online voting through various initiatives, firstly from 2003 and 2015, and since 2015 on the basis of new, national systems and legislation. Verification has proven to be a concern, but cantons and the federal government have still been able to retain public support in rolling online voting out, while providing assurances as to the security and reliability of the system overall.

### Estonia

Estonia has had a form of online voting in place for nearly twenty years; in the 2019 elections nearly half of electors voted online. Verification of votes is provided by means of QR code by which a mobile app can capture and check the recorded vote as placed on a desktop machine. There has still been criticism (principally from those who have claimed to have hacked or otherwise subverted the system) and calls for more effective, “end-to-end” verification of ballots cast.

### Scotland

Scotland is moving towards the implementation of online voting. In 2019 the Government agreed to conduct a trial; the precise terms and details of the trial are yet to be published.

## Local Democracy and Political Inequality

60% of voters who didn't vote in recent elections didn't do so because of trust and engagement. For the remainder the reason for not doing so was a lack of time.<sup>122</sup> We heard evidence that some of the cultural and psychological issues here are overlooked, with the tendency to focus on standard demographic terms – such as non-voting by gender, age or ethnicity.<sup>123</sup> Much depends on identifying the distinct characteristics of non-voters. For young people, encouragement to vote needs to take the form of going where young people already are – as well as engaging with those well under 18. For the young and old, political discussion often happens online in “closed” spaces like private Facebook groups. We heard that embedding the council in these spaces (and vice versa) might provide an opportunity for engagement. For many, one challenge is simply one of awareness<sup>124</sup>; of councils, what they do, and how they can make a difference. Our expectation is that the introduction of a “framework for participation” and the wider changes proposed in our “Newham Mayoral model” will work towards breaking down these barriers. But specific, directed and high-profile action is needed now on these issues, and the council should not wait to act until those structures have been established.

There is more that the council can do to promote accessibility within the existing system for electoral administration. Physical accessibility will always be a focus in the review of polling places but the accessibility of the virtual environment is important too. Future polling place reviews and audits of accessibility should be carried out alongside people with “protected characteristics” in the Equality Act – including disabled people – to ensure that issues which might not be obvious to an able person can be identified. More general accessibility issues may include:

- Clearer communication to local people about arrangements for postal and proxy voting;
- Use of demographic insights to conduct focused education campaigns targeted at particular communities and areas of Newham which experience especially low turnout;
- Co-production with local civil society groups (and national organisations) of approaches to better understand barriers to voting and to overcome them.

Actions in this area will need to integrate with wider council activity around resident involvement and co-production, and will need to align with rules, systems and procedures around the conduct of elections. We think that the need for physical, and wider, accessibility is particularly pertinent given that Newham was an Olympic and Paralympic Host Borough.

Beyond these immediate steps, however, there will be more to do. People's expectations on voting and democratic engagement in ten or twenty years' time could make current practices look increasingly anachronistic. Policy needs to be developed accordingly. This involves understanding barriers now, but also being prepared to understand how demographics, attitudes and approaches will shift how those barriers manifest themselves in future. We agree with those who told us that the burden of responsibility should lie on councillors to better understand how to engage to represent people better<sup>125</sup> – which may involve broadening the pool of those willing to put themselves forward for elected office. Our findings and recommendations on the role of councillors expand on this in more detail. In terms of encouraging a wider range of candidates for election, a range of national resources exist to do this.

<sup>118</sup> An example of piloting of these arrangements in Ireland can be found at Commission on Electronic Voting on the Secrecy, Accuracy and Testing of the Chosen Electronic Voting System (2006), Second Report: <https://ptfs-oireachtas.s3.amazonaws.com/DriveF/Data/Library3/Library2/DL001570.pdf> (Accessed 3 April 2020)

<sup>119</sup> DTLR/LGA (2002) The implementation of electronic voting in the UK, [https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/electoral\\_commission\\_pdf\\_file/Implementationofe-votingsummary\\_6720-6268\\_E\\_N\\_S\\_W\\_.pdf](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/electoral_commission_pdf_file/Implementationofe-votingsummary_6720-6268_E_N_S_W_.pdf) (Accessed 3 April 2020)

<sup>120</sup> Liptrott M. (2007) “e-Voting: Same Pilots, Same Problems, Different Agendas” The Electronic Journal of e-Government Volume 5 Issue 2, pp 205 - 212

<sup>121</sup> Electoral Commission (2007) Electronic voting: 2007 pilot schemes, [https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/electoral\\_commission\\_pdf\\_file/Electronicvotingsummarypaper\\_27194-20114\\_E\\_N\\_S\\_W\\_.pdf](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/electoral_commission_pdf_file/Electronicvotingsummarypaper_27194-20114_E_N_S_W_.pdf) (Accessed 3 April 2020)

<sup>122</sup> Evidence from Areeq Chowdhury (WebRoots Democracy), Second Evidence Hearing, 10 January 2020

<sup>123</sup> Evidence from Joe Mitchell (Democracy Club), Second Evidence Hearing, 10 January 2020

<sup>124</sup> Ibid

<sup>125</sup> Evidence from Areeq Chowdhury (WebRoots Democracy), Joe Mitchell (Democracy Club), Second Evidence Hearing, 10 January 2020

## Local Democracy and Political Inequality

The Commission recommends the establishment of a taskforce directly to identify those who are excluded or otherwise not engaged in formal representative democracy in Newham, and to set out a targeted approach to civic education on local democracy. This taskforce should work to the goals of increasing registration and voter turnout, and supporting local action on political and civic education. The taskforce would work closely with the O3D to gather insight to support its work.

The Commission recommends that the council and taskforce works with Newham Citizens and other partners further to mobilise schools and colleges to link civic and citizen education with democratic participation – from community organising, into registration drives for young people, and improving turnout at elections.

The Commission also recommends the development of local leadership development programmes, supported by organisations such as Operation Black Vote and the Local Government Association’s “Be A Councillor” programme.

The Commission looked at the prospect for bringing back the youth council and Young Mayor, but felt that without more fundamental changes to the opportunities available to young people across the board this would fail to mobilise people in the way that we would like. Instead, a more holistic approach to introducing democracy into schools could, in time, lead to bottom-up calls from young people for more borough-wide spaces for them.

The Commission believes that the council should work with local schools and young people to develop a guide for making schools more democratic, linked to citizenship education / PSHE. This might include supporting the bolstering of powers for school councils on things like school contracts and teacher appointments, and might also include activity in primary schools.

The Commission also supports experimenting with on-line voting and recommends that, should Government carry out pilots for online voting in the near future, the council should put itself forward.

### 7.3 LOCAL MEDIA

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A healthy democracy depends on a vibrant public sphere with a free and independent media. Yet like many other areas in England, Newham does not benefit from a strong and well-resourced local media. Local newspapers like the Newham Recorder no longer possess the resources that were once available for reporting on public life in the borough.

The Council produces a “newspaper” or newsletter on a bi-monthly basis called the Newham Mag. It is a publication which reaches every household in the area, and which is valued<sup>126</sup> – but it is published by the council and therefore lacks the independence of a free press. The council also established a Citizen Journalist panel in October 2019 to help promote open and transparent democracy. Panel members write articles for the Newham Mag. They are also currently conducting a feasibility study for a regular, not-for-profit hyperlocal news service, dedicated to local community issues.

We recommend that the council extends its action in this area, helping to promote a vibrant and independent local media. It can learn from other areas in England that have mutual or co-operative local media organisations, such as the Bristol Cable.

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<sup>126</sup> Appendix A, Public Engagement Findings

## Local Democracy and Political Inequality

### BRISTOL CABLE

Bristol Cable is a community co-operative, an organisation established with the intention of producing community-owned public-interest journalism. A co-operative was seen as a way to make the project financially viable – by developing a sense of local ownership. The co-op also carries out wider activism and education activities alongside its investigative journalism. It operates a “Media Lab” which gives local people the skills necessary for investigative journalism and provides a platform to publish the results. The Bristol Cable publishes on-line and off-line through a free quarterly newspaper with a circulation of 30,000<sup>127</sup>.

These are co-operatively owned and managed organisations that publish – on and off-line – investigative reports, opinion pieces and local news. Consistent with Newham’s community wealth building agenda, support for such a development should take the form of seed-funding a cooperative or mutual media organisation by converting a small amount of the council’s capital income into a revenue stream through the creation of an endowment fund. Local support and capacity can be developed with the support of local FE colleges and universities (see below).

Such an organisation would be governed in a way that reflected and represented the wider community and would collaborate with traditional and established media outlets within and beyond the borough to enhance their capacity. It would produce serious investigative journalism, opinion pieces and analysis in a way that would provide a distinctive voice for Newham’s residents.

Newham’s significant capital income from regeneration (£350 million from the Royal Docks alone) provides a possible solution to the funding challenge here. It is possible to use capital funds to establish an endowment fund<sup>128</sup> that can provide revenue funding for an organisation during its start-up phase, the intention being that it would become independently financially viable in due course with a business model that takes advantage of opportunities for partnership and collaboration. Other than provision of the endowment and assistance in co-producing the articles and founding principles of such a venture (to assure that public funds are being spent properly), our expectation is that this organisation would be wholly independent of the council.

**The Commission recommends the creation of a cooperative, citizens’ media organisation in Newham, funded in a start-up phase through an endowment. This would support independent journalism and enhanced democratic debate in the borough.**

<sup>127</sup> Bristol Cable (2020), About us (webpage), <https://thebristolcable.org/about/> (Accessed 3 April 2020)

<sup>128</sup> For example, Nesta (the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts), and a number of “What Works” centres (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-works-network>)





# Section

## The Role of Local Councillors

# The Role of Local Councillors

## THE ROLE OF LOCAL COUNCILLORS: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

**The Commission recommends that councillors – using our findings as a foundation – make clear what roles they individually and collectively expect to perform in relation to:**

- **The development of borough-wide policy at the council and in the wider area;**
- **Influencing, scrutinising and challenging the council and other partners;**
- **New arrangements for locality and area working.**

**The Commission recommends a systematic approach to member development and training which engages with these roles, and with the rest of our recommendations.**

**The Commission recommends that Newham’s scrutiny function have a key role under the Newham Mayoral model to oversee and support new deliberative systems for policy-making, including being the conduit for recommendations and proposals arising from the new standing citizen’s assembly.**

**The Commission recommends that Newham review its co-option scheme, to consider opportunities to draw individuals with a wider range of perspectives onto formal committees and/or scrutiny task and finish groups.**

## 8.1 COUNCILLORS’ ROLES

The way that reform of the local government sector has accelerated in recent years – driven by financial austerity but a range of other forces too (like demographics and technological change) – means that an understanding of the role of the councillor has lagged behind change.<sup>129</sup>

In other jurisdictions councils tend to be smaller, in terms of membership and geographical size. In England, the comparatively large size of local government is predominantly a hangover from the committee system, where a larger number of councillors was needed to fill a large number of decision-making roles; and the various consolidations and enlargements of English councils.<sup>130</sup>

Throughout our work we have been conscious that in a refreshed and revitalised Newham mayoral model, the role of the “ordinary” or “backbench” councillor will be crucial. Such councillors have a variety of roles to contribute. These include<sup>131</sup> :

- Developing a meaningful understanding of local communities – “deep hanging out”<sup>132</sup>, which can contribute to the council’s understanding of those it serves. This can be built into our proposals for a “framework for participation”, and our recommendations for involvement in the democratic process, as part of the “Newham Mayoral model”.
- Carrying out formal scrutiny of council business (which is an important feature of the governance framework, which we cover below).
- Contributing to the development of council policy.
- Convening communities at a local level – bringing people together. This is a role that many councillors carry out informally, but not in a way that appears integrated with the authority’s wider systems<sup>133</sup>.
- Sorting problems out for local people. This tends to be a focus and preoccupation for many councillors<sup>134</sup>, with the “transactional” nature of this role leading some to become disengaged and disillusioned.

<sup>129</sup> Evidence from Jonathan Carr-West (LGiU), Third Evidence Hearing, 29 January 2020

<sup>130</sup> In London, the current London Borough structures date from 1965. New councils were created by merging a number of former metropolitan boroughs of the London County Council area (and certain outlying parts of Essex, Kent and so on). Newham’s area was previously covered by three pre-1965 councils.

<sup>131</sup> Derived from LGA (2018), Councillor census; LGRU (2017). The voice of the councillor; evidence from Cllr Tom Coole (Gloucester City Council), Third Evidence Hearing, 29 January 2020

<sup>132</sup> Ibid

<sup>133</sup> Appendix C, Councillor Survey Findings

## The Role of Local Councillors

The fact, though, remains that under current arrangements, many of these councillors find themselves struggling for a meaningful role. The concentration of power in the hands of a Mayor is a design feature of the current Mayoral system, reflecting national practice. The Mayor appoints a Cabinet to exercise executive power alongside her but there is a risk that the remaining councillors feel shut out and disengaged.

The results of our councillor survey indicate that there are some tensions and frustrations evident in the councillor role. Councillors want to do more in two areas – on community leadership, and in decision-making at the council corporately. More traditional “Town Hall” roles – sitting on scrutiny committees and participating in planning and licensing decision-making – are less widely attractive.

Overall, of the 28 councillors who provided a response to the survey:

- 71% were keen to exercise more of an active leadership role;
- 64% wanted to campaign locally on matters of community importance;
- Only 25% and 21% wanted to do more scrutiny, or more planning and licensing work, respectively.

Most respondents felt that the council’s leadership was accountable – to local people and to councillors themselves – and that decision-making was clear.<sup>135</sup> But a sizeable number of members felt that they were unable to influence or challenge decisions.<sup>136</sup>

We would not characterise councillors’ views on these issues as demonstrating unusual levels of disengagement; a degree of dissatisfaction is fairly typical of most authorities.

<sup>137</sup>But for any authority, this should be a spur to action.

Disengagement is a particular risk in a borough like Newham, with a changing population whose needs are complex, and in the context of the wider changes that we recommend for governance and democracy in the borough. The role of councillors in driving forward these changes – and being central to new arrangements once implemented

– is something that needs to be embedded. But councillors will need support to make this happen.

We think that an overarching narrative on councillors’ roles is necessary for the new Newham mayoral model. This will include <sup>138</sup>:

- At a borough-wide level, influencing, questioning, challenging and critiquing the work of wider institutions. This fits in with the Mayoral “place-shaping” role we discussed earlier.
- An overall focus that is more to do with localities – wards and neighbourhoods – tying in to the area working arrangements we highlighted in section three.<sup>139</sup> In area working arrangements, they can have a role in leading social action in communities and deciding on the way that spending decisions are made; they can be “Cabinet members” for their wards and localities.

These can be designed to align with existing roles at the council and in the community – particularly the scrutiny role, which we see as the “gateway” into the council for some of the deliberative mechanisms we recommend. A role for councillors – in oversight, in setting direction, and in representing community views – needs to be designed throughout into new systems. We also think that the role of councillors needs to be explicitly front and centre in the next iteration of the Corporate Plan and in the council’s ongoing changes to its culture and operating model. Councillors need to play a vocal part in determining what their roles – individual and collective – will be across council business.

### 8.2 MEMBER TRAINING, DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

For councillors to exercise these roles effectively it will require a commitment to training and development. This is not something on which we have taken detailed evidence<sup>140</sup> but as a matter of general principle:

- Member development plans should be produced by members themselves;
- Member development should be driven by members’ own sense of their needs. The development of member role

<sup>134</sup> Ibid

<sup>135</sup> 46% of respondents strongly agreed that the council was accountable to local people, and to councillors themselves.

<sup>136</sup> 21% and 25% of councillors either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were able to respectively influence or challenge decision-making.

<sup>137</sup> Evidence from Cllr Tom Coole (Gloucester City Council), Colin Copus (DMU/LGRU), Third Evidence Hearing, 29 January 2020

<sup>138</sup> Ibid

<sup>139</sup> Evidence from Ruth Breidenbach-Roe (Locality), Third Evidence hearing, 29 January 2020

# The Role of Local Councillors

profiles, for example, might work against this;

- Member development plans will need to address head on the issues and root causes behind councillor disengagement. We feel that the other changes we propose will provide the catalyst for a sea change in thinking and assumptions on this, but this cannot be taken for granted;
- Member development should be designed into members' day-to-day roles rather than being delivered as "formal" training, which many councillors may not attend and which may be both artificial and resource intensive.

**The Commission recommends that councillors – using our findings as a foundation – make clear what roles they individually and collectively expect to perform in relation to:**

- **The development of borough-wide policy at the council, and in the wider area;**
- **Influencing, scrutinising and challenging the council and other partners;**
- **New arrangements for locality and area working.**

**This will involve reappraising existing roles and functions.**

**The Commission recommends a systematic approach to member development and training which engages with these roles, and with the rest of our recommendations.**

## 8.3 COUNCILLORS' ROLES ON SCRUTINY

Councils operating "executive arrangements" (either Mayoral or leader/cabinet systems) must have at least one overview and scrutiny committee (OSC). OSCs are bodies made up of local elected councillors (but to which others may be co-opted), which hold the council's executive to account. The council may appoint scrutiny officers to provide policy advice to committees, and by law must designate an officer, a "statutory scrutiny officer", to promote and protect the function.

All councils have different approaches to overview and scrutiny. Newham has an overarching overview and scrutiny commission and four overview and scrutiny committees<sup>141</sup>.

Scrutiny has a responsibility for investigating any matters which affects "the area or the area's inhabitants". Scrutiny committees have the power to require attendance from Cabinet members and from senior officers of the council. They can require that responses be given to their recommendations. Scrutiny councillors have broad powers to access information held by the authority in carrying out their work.

Scrutiny forms an important part of a council's corporate governance framework, but scrutiny's work is often not especially visible to local people. Scrutiny has specific statutory functions and responsibilities around holding to account a council's executive, and also certain partner organisations – principally local NHS bodies and community safety partnerships.

The work of the Commission does not involve a detailed review of scrutiny, but scrutiny will need to align with any new governance model. In particular, good scrutiny will align well with new area-based arrangements. These arrangements can pass up intelligence about challenges faced by local people into scrutiny committees at a corporate level; issues causing concern to multiple localities can be "escalated" to scrutiny in this way. Some common ways of working for scrutiny include:

- Considering forthcoming decisions in committee before they are submitted to Cabinet, sometimes called "pre-decision" scrutiny;
- "Calling-in" decisions which have been made, but not yet been implemented. This is a statutory function of scrutiny;
- Holding public meetings, or otherwise gathering evidence from the public to support work;
- Drawing in evidence from experts and others to support the making of recommendations;
- Convening informal "task and finish" groups to look in more detail at pressing local issues.

<sup>140</sup> The Commission has had regard in its evidence gathering to the work of the Local Government Association and the Leadership Centre on political leadership, as well as University of Birmingham/LGA (2016), The 21st Century Councillor, <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/21st-century-councillor.pdf> (Accessed 2 April 2010). Evidence taken from Professor Colin Copus also touched on these issues.

<sup>141</sup> <https://www.newham.gov.uk/Pages/Services/Scrutiny.aspx>

## The Role of Local Councillors

Scrutiny can also be space where policy development can happen, and could provide an “independent” space for deliberation and discussion on such issues, a space not “owned” by the executive. In Newham this already happens through increased use of “pre-decision” scrutiny (recent examples having included scrutiny of the Housing Allocations Policy, and ongoing budget development scrutiny). Opportunities are there for this form of pre-decision scrutiny to be increased. We think that the scrutiny function might provide the main space by which the various deliberative elements of our recommendations, and arrangements relating to co-production, might “dock in” to formal governance. This would give a clear, important, new role to scrutiny and to the councillors who sit on scrutiny committees, bolstering their activity through oversight of deliberation and co-production.

It also leaves the way open for scrutiny to begin experimenting itself with deliberative tools in the formulation of its own recommendations, and the use of co-production.

One way to bolster this might be through co-option. Scrutiny committees have the power to co-opt members of the public onto them. This requires a council to draft a co-option scheme which sets out the mechanism by which it can happen. This can provide a mechanism for drawing in the insights and perspectives of those otherwise underrepresented.

**The Commission recommends that Newham’s scrutiny function have a key role under the Newham Mayoral model to oversee and support new deliberative systems for policy-making, including being the conduit for recommendations and proposals arising from the new standing citizen’s assembly.**

**The Commission recommends that Newham review its co-option scheme, to consider opportunities to draw individuals with a wider range of perspectives onto formal committees and/or scrutiny task and finish groups.**

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<sup>93</sup> Loeffler, E. (2020). Co-Production of Public Services and Outcomes. London: Palgrave Macmillan (forthcoming).

<sup>94</sup> O’Shea, J. (2020). Coronavirus: Volunteers rally round to help those self-isolating. BBC News 11 March 2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-51821470>.

<sup>95</sup> Appendix, Public Engagement Findings





# Appendices



## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Recommendations and supporting actions

The Commission is making ten core recommendations to the Council. Our expectation is that the Council will produce a timed action plan to ensure their implementation, and that this implementation will be monitored.

The Commission also suggests a number of supporting actions. We do not consider that these should be separately monitored because their implementation will closely map to the implementation of the core recommendations. We expect, though, that they will need to form an important part of the action plan.

It is our view that our recommendations form part of a single, holistic package – what we have called the “Newham mayoral model”.

| Core recommendations |  |
|----------------------|--|
| 1                    | The Commission recommends the adoption of a two-term limit for the executive Mayor   |
| 2                    | The Commission recommends the establishment of a permanent citizen’s assembly, meeting a minimum of twice a year, to respond to and act on important, emerging local issues.   |
| 3                    | The Commission recommends that the Council should amend the role and focus of the scrutiny function - in particular to give scrutiny a role in overseeing the Council’s new deliberative and co-production systems - alongside more clarity on the role of councillors in policy development and decision-making more generally, and revisions to the Council’s co-option scheme for scrutiny committees.  |
| 4                    | The Commission recommends that Newham expands <b>participatory, area-based democracy</b> in the borough. Funding allocated for decision on the basis of neighbourhood participation should be substantially increased from the current level of £25,000. The aim should be to spend a minimum of 20% of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) resources through neighbourhood or area-based participation. Processes for the development of neighbourhood priorities should be aligned with engagement on the annual budget cycle of the borough, so that residents can feed in their priorities at the earliest stages to the overall Council budget. |
| 5                    | The Commission recommends that a borough-wide <b>community governance</b> review be carried out, to co-produce with local people a framework and structure to how devolution and area governance will work. This review should be carried out alongside the determination of an area in which to pilot a new urban parish.   |
| 6                    | The Commission recommends that Newham works with local people to develop a <b>framework of mutual expectations around participation and involvement</b> – built on trust and respect, and as an integral part of a new Newham Mayoral model. The development of this framework could be one of the first tasks of a new standing citizens’ assembly (see below). The Council can start now to experiment with more ambitious approaches on participation to feed into the development of this framework.   |
| 7                    | The Commission recommends that the <b>“One Newham” partnership</b> be seen as a primary vehicle for the Council to engage with the voluntary and community sector to better understand the infrastructure support they need. There should also be a central unit in the Council with a remit to disseminate knowledge and expertise within the authority for co-production and community engagement. Community organisations should become valued partners in regeneration, planning, and the arts and culture, as well as co-producers in major service areas.  |
| 8                    | The Commission recommends the <b>creation of a Mayor’s Office for Data, Discovery and Democracy</b> – or ‘O3D’ for short – to integrate open data and data analytics, user-led policy R & D, and expertise in the tools and techniques of co-production and community participation.   |
| 9                    | The Commission recommends the establishment of <b>a taskforce directly to identify those who are excluded or otherwise not engaged in formal representative democracy</b> in Newham, and to set out a targeted approach to civic education on local democracy. This taskforce should work to the goals of increasing registration and voter turnout, and supporting local action on political and civic education. The taskforce would work closely with the O3D to gather insight to support its work.  |
| 10                   | The Commission recommends the creation of a <b>cooperative, citizens’ media organisation</b> in Newham, funded in a start up phase through an endowment. This would support independent journalism and enhanced democratic debate in the borough.  |

## Supporting actions

The Council should **review its “local choice” functions**, to consider whether certain functions and activities could be placed in the hands of full Council

The Council should establish an annual “People’s Council”, replacing an existing full Council meeting, providing an opportunity for the Mayor to set out her “state of the borough” and an opportunity for local people to hold her to account directly; and at other meetings of full Council, expanded opportunity for public questions.

The Council should establish a clearer **role for a Council “Speaker”**, an enhancement of the Council Chair role which currently exists to perform ceremonial functions currently carried out by the executive Mayor. This would of course not preclude the executive Mayor from a presence and involvement in the civic life of the borough, the demarcation of the roles being something that would need to be subject to further dialogue and agreement

The Council should establish a **standing or permanent citizens’ assembly for Newham**, to meet a minimum of twice a year. The citizens’ assembly would respond to and act on important, emerging local issues. Its membership should be selected by sortition and a proportion should rotate each year. This assembly would select issues to deliberate upon and initiate policy agendas for the Council. It would dock directly into the Council’s formal decision-making systems, both through the scrutiny function (in terms of alignment of work programmes and support) and directly with the Mayor (by feeding into cabinet decision-making through changes to the Council’s constitution).

The Council should evaluate existing co-production methods, with local people themselves, as part of a process that sees local community assets, resources and experiences mapped.

The Council should seek to better understand, as part of community asset mapping, how **existing knowledge, skills and best practice** can be appraised and pooled within the local authority. Officers and councillors should be offered training on the best methods of community engagement, and the Council should build into its future plans a bias in favour of citizen involvement in masterplanning, and co-production on regeneration, and the arts and cultural programmes that are funded by major redevelopment schemes.

The Council and the O3D (once established) should assertively **develop partnerships with local universities and other research groups**, taking advantage of the opportunity to draw in research funding from elsewhere to support a step-change in the use of data and citizen engagement in the governance of the borough. The arrival of UCL East provide clear opportunities here.

The Council should extend its use of the **“mixed reality” of online deliberation** and consensus forming with more traditional engagement on a focused and specific issue of local concern, to see what works. Expertise should be sought from places where these democratic innovations have been pioneered, such as Taiwan, Spain, Iceland and elsewhere. This can be fed into wider planning for co-production, and area governance.

The Council and taskforce should work with Newham Citizens and other partners further to **mobilise schools and colleges to link civic and citizen education with democratic participation** – from community organising, into registration drives for young people, and improving turnout at elections.

The Council should develop **local leadership development programmes**, supported by organisations such as Operation Black Vote and the Local Government Association’s “Be A Councillor” programme.

The Council should work with local schools and young people to develop a guide for **making schools more democratic**, linked to citizenship education / PSHE. This might include supporting the bolstering of powers for school councils on things like school contracts and teacher appointments, and might also include activity in primary schools.

The Council should experiment with **on-line voting** and recommends that, should Government carry out pilots for online voting in the near future, the Council should put itself forward.

The Council should take a systematic approach to **member development and training** which engages with these roles, and with the rest of our recommendations.

## Appendices

### APPENDIX 2: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT – SUMMARY FINDINGS

#### Introduction

The Democratic Society (Demsoc), in partnership with the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), were commissioned to provide support to the Democracy Commission by gathering residents' views through a range of engagement activities as described in this report. The word "we" in this Appendix refers to Demsoc and CfPS employees and consultants.

During a fortnight in January 2020, we held 24 face to face engagement sessions in 23 locations, and spoke to over 350 people who live in, or have links to, the London Borough of Newham. The facilitation of sessions was conducted by staff from Demsoc and CfPS. The session at St. Bonaventures School was co-designed, co-facilitated and hosted by young people from Newham Citizens. Andy Paice, a Newham resident who has worked on several engagement projects in the borough, joined the Demsoc team as an associate for this project.

These events were a combination of dedicated 'Democracy Commission' events and attending existing groups and meetings that were already happening in communities. These included English as a Second Language (ESOL) classes, a Youth Centre and a Community Forum meeting. We also spoke with people in public spaces including the Tube station and Asda Supermarket in Canning town.

We set up an online platform accessed via Newham Councils website where people could share their comments and suggestions and 41 people shared their thoughts through this channel.

Our engagement approach was primarily focussed on trying to reach people the council is less likely to hear from during general consultation processes and to hear their suggestions for how local governance, and the participation of citizens within local democracy, can be improved.

We asked questions based on 6 topics:

1. Involving Residents in Local Decision-Making
2. Using Digital Tools for Local Democracy
3. Working in Partnership with Residents
4. Giving Equal Voice to All
5. Supporting Communities
6. Choosing the Best Structures for Local Decision-Making

A summary of findings under each of these 6 topics is shown below.

## Summary of findings

### 1. INVOLVING RESIDENTS IN LOCAL DECISION-MAKING

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#### How can the council do a better job of involving residents in local decisions?

The largest share of comments were about the council and councillors being **more visible, getting out and listening to residents**. Suggestions included regular local forums, street walks, and going out to community groups, community centres and schools.

*'Council to be visible and meet local communities to address our issues. Know our people and our issues.'*

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There were also comments about involving people more in decisions and developing services. The Democracy Commission's use of outside experts was seen as one example of a failure to focus on empowering local people. Other comments were about a need for transparent communication, feedback and accountability and accessible information and promotion. This was about hearing what action had been taken on issues raised, more information about what decisions are being made, and more understanding and promotion of opportunities to have your say.

There was also a sense that the council should be more transparent about its performance and about challenges it might face.

***'Newham Mag ... total propaganda, only shows good things.  
Why not also show things we still need to look at. An example of lack of transparency.'***

### Experiences of involvement

Many comments were about a lack of interest in being involved or having no experience of involvement. Other people were able to give examples such as taking part in a local taskforce, getting help with resolving a local issue, or going along to a local meeting. Although we also heard a number of concerns that involvement had not led to change. We heard positive examples of young people being involved - such as discussing knife crime with the Mayor. Neighbourhood assemblies came up in several comments. While some people praised these, there were also calls for more feedback about what has happened with things that had been raised there.

### Other comments about involvement in local decision-making

There were a wide-range of comments recorded. One thing that came up a lot was **The Newham Mag**. This was often raised as a place that people were getting information from, but there were concerns that the content is too promotional and lacking in more useful information.

***'The Newham Mag only has photos of the Mayor'***

We heard a number of comments about **disinterest, distrust or a lack of involvement** amongst citizens; most frequently at the street stalls, where we were talking to whoever was walking past rather than people already accessing council services or those who had come specifically to talk to us.

There were also comments about **disingenuousness or poor listening**. This included concerns that decisions have been made before consultations happen, that the council wasn't listening, and that citizen input was seen as a barrier with views not taken on board

***'When you raise issues, you should not be seen as a trouble-maker'***

There were calls for the council to **better serve the residents of Newham** - often this was linked with development. Some people phrased this as councillors being self-serving whereas others talked about a lack of expertise and confidence at standing up to developers.

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## 2. USING DIGITAL TOOLS FOR LOCAL DEMOCRACY

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### What ideas do you have about how the council can best make use of digital tools?

Many comments were about using digital tools for **communication and sharing information** and **promotion and outreach**. It was felt that social media could help the council reach further and promote opportunities to have your say, including by researching and reaching out through local Facebook groups. It was also felt that online communication could be an important part of improving feedback.

There were also a lot of comments about giving local people **ways of speaking up online**.

Suggestions included: surveys, polls, petitions, forums, and web chat. There were also comments about how online channels can be more accessible for people with disabilities or who may otherwise find it hard to attend and speak up at meetings.

Alongside this were concerns about digital barriers. These were mainly concerns that digital channels shouldn't be the only way of getting in touch, particularly with regards to accessing services or reporting something.

## 3. WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH RESIDENTS

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### Are there particular things that you think the council and residents should be working together on?

The things that came up most frequently (in order) were: public spaces; youth services; community safety; housing and homelessness; environment and climate change; planning and regeneration, traffic and parking, and local businesses (mainly about Queens Market, where we held a stall).

### Examples and experiences of working in partnership

We heard positive examples such as youth assemblies and working with residents to re-design the council website. At the same time there were comments about **a lack of 'co-production'**, including concerns that citizens are involved once decisions have been made, and that citizen involvement could be more joined-up. The Democracy Commission itself was raised as an example of an approach that lacked coproduction.

***'There are so many events where people share their views  
and they are taken away - feels like starting a conversation that is already happening'***

There were some concerns about how the council works with partners in the community, including this being a 'transactional' and 'asymmetric' relationship rather than thinking together about issues with those working on the ground, and that there is a lack of funding to support involvement in co-production. There were also concerns about how well the council supports community-led activity, including a lack of support for campaigns and other community-led activities and funding being unpredictable.

### Suggestions for working in partnership

There were **calls for greater coproduction, partnership or involvement**. People talked about the importance of being seen as equals; there being a relationship between the council and communities; feeling ownership over issues; and being involved throughout the process.

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*'Working together only works when the council and residents are seen as equals and all views are important'*

There was also a call for **empowering bottom up action**. Largely this was about concentrating on identifying and supporting groups that are already making a difference in communities.

*'I'd like to see Newham kick start many more community groups with training on how they can help themselves and apply for realistic support.'*

### 4. GIVING EQUAL VOICE TO ALL

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#### How easy is it to have your voice heard in Newham?

We heard a lot of concerns about **issues with reporting something, accessing services or making routine contact with the council**.

*'There is a gap between what the mayor says and the reality of experience communicating with the department. You have to keep starting all over again.'*

There were also concerns about **not listening, or poor listening**. People described being perceived as a troublemaker or 'nimby' if they speak up and feeling that their views aren't taken seriously. And there were concerns about **inaction and a lack of reply** when things are raised. Alongside this were **positive experiences**, mainly from people the council had helped.

#### How do you know the council has heard you?

We heard many examples about a **lack of feedback or response**. There was also a suggestion that people aren't seeing how resident input is being used in general, and that there is not enough transparency of how answers to consultations are considered. There were also a number of comments about **not listening or inaction**, once something had been raised.

There was a smaller number of comments highlighting **positive examples of feedback** – including the work of community teams, boards about citizens assemblies in the library, and the work of Citizens UK.

#### Are there certain types of people that the council hears from more than others?

Ethnicity, came up most frequently; mainly in the concern that some ethnic groups receive worse treatment from councillors or staff of a different ethnicity.

Hearing from the loudest voices was also raised, including more organised groups, a small number who engage in local structures, and the suggestion that the council has 'cliques' and favoured areas.

There were also a number of comments about language barriers, and barriers for people with disabilities, including people with learning disabilities.

#### How can the council hear from everyone?

The need for **a range of formats and responding to specific needs** was raised, for instance not requiring people to use online channels of communication.



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There were a number of comments about **reaching out through networks**, such as youth centres, faith groups, community centres, charities, local businesses, and other community groups. And comments about **getting out into communities and bringing conversations to people**.

***‘Encourage the council to come to us to hear us,  
so they hear us in our communities... so we are less shy and stronger’***

There were also comments about **tackling language barriers; better communication** - to promote opportunities to engage and feedback afterwards; and **a need for changed attitudes**, including greater respect for the voice of young people and tackling discrimination of people with learning disabilities.

### 5. SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

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**What ideas do you have about how councils can best support communities to speak up and take action?**

People wanted to see the council **supporting what the community are already doing**.

***‘Start from where people want to start and how the council can  
facilitate and support - not from consultation alone.’***

This enabling activity would involve ongoing financial support. People had ideas which focused on the council convening local collaboration – by linking up those with mutual interests and needs and helping people and organisations to offer mutual aid.

This linked to people’s calls for further and better communication by the council – using its communication channels (such as the Newham Mag) to amplify local collaborative activity. Supporting the work of tenants’ associations was one example highlighted. There were also calls for the council to listen more to residents, communicate, and involve them in decisions or other activities. People thought that there were opportunities for better civic education, and training about rights and activism.

**How can councillors support communities?**

A lot of people were **keen to see the profile of councillors raised**. This also involved wanting to see councillors “standing up” for Newham – potentially in challenging developers.

**Other comments about supporting communities**

Some people wanted to see more funding going to community centres, given that they provide a physical space where people can come together. This was seen as linked to the need to provide more services to young people (something which a range of people wanted, not just young people themselves).

A particularly urgent need was seen to be the need to build cohesion. There was seen to be a degree of tension between some groups – including a sense that certain communities or racial and ethnic groups were getting better treatment than others. One person talked about the importance of the council improving cohesion and needing to ‘break down’ the air of suspicion between communities’.

***‘Facilitate conversations to break down the barriers. We have to talk!’***

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### 6. CHOOSING THE BEST STRUCTURES FOR LOCAL DECISION-MAKING

**From the three options [committee system; elected mayor and cabinet; leader and cabinet] what is your preference and why?**

We generally put this question to people in events where we had a chance to sit down with people for a length of time to explain and discuss each structure before asking them which they preferred. Some said they didn't have enough information and others stressed that wider considerations were more important than the choice of system. Only a small number of participants chose to vote. Of those expressing a preference, most preferred the Mayoral system.

Talking about the **committee system**, people liked how it **spread power**, but there were concerns about the **risk of indecision and slowness**.

Talking about the **elected mayor and cabinet system**, people were positive about the opportunities for **democratic control** and **strong leadership** under this system. People also cited positive direct experiences of the **current mayor** as positive factors. But there were also concerns about a Mayor's ability to **hold too much power**, as well as concerns about the conflation between the **executive role of the Mayor and the ceremonial role as "first citizen" of the borough participating in civic events**.

Talking about the **leader and cabinet system**, people talked about the opportunities within this system to spread power, and about a **balance between action and collaboration**. But there were concerns that it was not as democratic as a system where a leading individual is directly elected, like the Mayoral system.

#### **Other comments about governance systems**

- The lack of opposition and challenge was raised – a pertinent factor in an authority without any party political opposition. There were also comments about a lack of action and response from councillors, and a lack of turnover.
- Devolution and delegation within the council were seen as important to spread power. And resident involvement was emphasized as a means to improve scrutiny and accountability.
- The importance of transparency and scrutiny was also highlighted; this was linked with the dominance of a single party.



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### APPENDIX 3: MINUTES OF EVIDENCE HEARINGS AND EVIDENCE TAKEN FROM INDIVIDUALS

#### Individuals from whom Commissioners took evidence

Where witnesses were unable to participate in a formal evidence hearing, individual Commissioners made arrangements to take evidence from them separately.

| Name of witness(es)  | Name of Commissioner taking evidence | Date             |
|--|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| Theo Blackwell and Christine Wingfield, GLA  | Nick Pearce                          | 30.01.2020       |
| Professor Vivien Lowndes, INLOGOV, University of Birmingham                                      | Nick Pearce                          | 30.01.2020       |
| Professor Catherine Needham, University of Birmingham  | Nick Pearce                          | 06.02.2020       |
| Dr. Torange Khonsari, London Metropolitan University, and Tim Peake, Royal Docks Community Voice | Nick Pearce                          | 21.02.2020       |
| Matthew Pike   | Nick Pearce                          | Written evidence |

### MINUTES OF EVIDENCE HEARINGS

#### Newham Democracy Commission

##### First evidence hearing: note

Attending      Nick Pearce (in the Chair)  
                     Fahmina Rahman  
                     Kush Kanodia  
                     Kenny Imafidon

Apologies      Dr Elke Loeffler  
                     Carl Miller

#### 1. Chair's welcome and introductions

- 1.1 The Chair opened the Commission's first meeting and invited Commission members to introduce themselves.
- 1.2 The Chair explained the overall objectives for the Commission, the objectives for this first evidence hearing and the approach that the Commission proposed to take to transact its work overall. He advised that the focus for this hearing was participative and deliberative democracy, and digital democracy.

#### 2. Evidence from Tim Hughes ([Involve](#))

- 2.1 The Chair invited Tim to explain Involve's work and to provide a general outline of the purposes and values involved in increasing citizen engagement, and an outline of Involve's current work.

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### 2.2 Tim told the Commission that:

- Involve's mission was to put people at the heart of decision-making – the organisation was interested in democracy between elections and supplementing representative systems of democracy;
- In his view, three values are lacking – openness (people understanding what decisions have been made on their behalf), participation (people having an opportunity to be involved and shaping decisions) and deliberation (having ways and mechanisms to negotiate differences and sharing common ground);
- Involve runs practical projects with a range of local authorities on matters such as climate change, road congestion and town centre improvement. He pointed to The MH2K project, which had seen Involve support the MH2K project, working with young people as citizen researchers to explore issues affecting mental health.

### 2.3 The Commission and Tim then explored a number of matters with a particular focus on deliberation, including:

- **The method for citizens' assemblies.** These are spaces where people come together to develop solutions to complex problems. They require a defined methodology and approach. Tim illustrated this with reference to an example of an assembly in [Cambridge](#) to discuss road congestion.
  - o Firstly, the question for the assembly to solve must relate to a complex topic which decision-makers have struggled to solve conventionally.
  - o Secondly, the assembly should be composed of a representative but randomly selected group of people. This involves inviting a large number of people to participate and based on responses sifting people to produce a representative sample. This is based on a two-step process – starting with a large mailshot to 8,000 to 10,000 randomly selected household (with some oversampling for certain groups), moving to a second stage which involves taking a gap analysis to identify underrepresented groups and on this basis creating a stratified random sample. It is possible that very small minority groups may not be represented as assemblies usually number around 50 people. This will usually provoke public bodies to carry out further engagement with these groups – it is important to recognise that a citizens' assembly will not be a system used in isolation. In some places, politicians may be involved in assemblies as full members (for example, in [Ireland](#)) – in others, they may play a role but not as part of an assembly themselves.
  - o Thirdly, bringing those people together in the same space to deliberate. This starts with learning (where assembly members hear from expert witnesses), moves to looking at the tradeoff between different courses of action and then finally deliberation and decision. The idea is not to come up with a wishlist but a practical set of actions – the process should engage closely with a sense of what is feasible (recognising there will be different views on this point). There will be a Venn diagram between what solutions work for the institution and what solutions make sense for the public – a big risk is that solutions can be exciting but are disengaged from the institution to which they are directed.
- **Accessibility and resourcing.** Participants will usually receive a payment for participating; wider accessibility implications for those possessing protecting characteristics under the Equalities Act are dealt with at design stage.
- **The biggest challenges associated with running assemblies.** Assemblies are resource intensive; they require senior buy in from the top of the organisation; participants, too, can be cynical about the process before getting involved. A big risk lies in the temptation to attempt to cut corners and try to design deliberation on the cheap. It is, though, possible to innovate with other methods which are less resource intensive.
- **Assemblies leading to results.** Findings and conclusions have to “dock” into existing decision-making structures. In terms of the existing UK experiences, this is a very new model and there are few examples so far of assemblies having led to change on the ground, although examples exist overseas.
- **“Standing” citizens' assemblies.** Some areas (such as [Ostbelgien](#)) have trialled standing assemblies – permanent structures sitting alongside and as part of formal decision-making systems.
- **Other forms of deliberation.** Smaller groups called citizens' juries can do the same kind of work in a more cost-effective way; simpler topics can be examined through facilitated sessions on shorter timescales. Also, approaches to deliberation online such as through tools like [Polis](#). Many of the central principles and features of assemblies can be applied to other systems. Participatory budgeting is not really a feature in England but has been more productively used in Scotland and in places like Madrid, Paris, Lisbon and New York.

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- **Openness and participation more generally.** There is a difference between reactive transparency (like FOI, where a public body publishes something on request) and proactive transparency (where a public body decides to publish something on its own initiative). The two do intersect – so FOI requests should lead to a public body publishing related information publicly in future. A range of data standards exist which allow people from within and outside the council to access and use data and information to build tools and analysis.
- **Building trust and relationships.** Deliberation means that the opportunity for relationship-building is built-in – particularly when participants are working together to learn more about a topic.

### 3. Evidence from Graham Smith (University of Westminster) and Claire Spencer (Acting Head of Inclusive Growth, West Midlands Combined Authority)

#### 3.1 The Chair invited Claire to comment on how a combined authority could work to involve and engage local people in major, strategic issues. Claire advised that:

- Good practice continues to develop. A Young Combined Authority has been established which arose out of the CA's Leadership Commission;
- The CA's Inclusive Growth Framework explains what "good" should look like. The phrase "inclusive growth" benefits from constructive ambiguity – ultimately it is about getting people to define themselves what benefits they see arising from economic growth, rather than focusing on GVA and GDP;
- The CA engages with a range of local organisations on the economy, social justice and economic justice, which feeds into a collective sense of what inclusive growth tools should do. This work is led by Localise West Midlands;
- The WMCA social economy taskforce has helped to address complex issues like the definition of social enterprise – certain enterprises may have socially positive effects in certain places but if transposed elsewhere, may not. This helps to ground public bodies' work in a more nuanced sense of what is and isn't important to local people;
- Attempts are being made to avoid a single strategy, instead producing a series of tools and guidelines to change practice. So there have been conversations about regeneration, about mental health, and structured conversations about using the concept of "growth corridors" to move away from a model of traditional consultation on regeneration towards one which sees local people actively involved at an earlier stage.

#### 3.2 The Chair invited Graham to comment from his perspective on participation, engagement and deliberation. Graham advised that:

- There is concern about councils and others running citizens' assemblies and other deliberative spaces just to be seen to be doing so;
- This form of participation is not necessarily being thought through carefully enough, and sloppy use could lead to legitimate methods being delegitimised, particularly given that many councils have limited resources for this kind of participation;
- What is required is a careful judgement about what the challenge we face requires.

#### 3.3 The Chair invited more general discussion, including questions and comments from other Commission members. In the course of this the following points were made by witnesses:

- Expectation management. Finding manageable solutions, understanding how to embed things in practice and emphasising that sometimes the wheels of democracy, and local government, move slowly but are all parts of making deliberation work. People need to understand where things will be going next, and need to have confidence their views will be taken seriously. In Gdansk, the Mayor said that he would implement any proposal which had over 80% support in a citizens' assembly. Solutions have to be docked into the political process – this has to form part of the design.
- Selecting experts to support deliberation. It may be better to describe these people as "witnesses" because they will often bring experience to bear on deliberations rather than just traditional "expertise". In terms of selection it is usual for an advisory board to be established with people of different perspectives who can collectively agree that they are happy with the range of witnesses being engaged. This worked well in the Scottish citizens' assembly on Brexit.

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- Supporting BAME groups and others to whom councils might find it “hard to listen”. At WMCA, the selection for the Young CA was based on a bias towards groups not already represented on the main CA Board. One approach to “reach” people where they already are is to support people to become citizen researchers with academic research skills – like the EU-funded “Use It” project in Birmingham. This potentially can get over issues of distrust of professionals. Trusted intermediaries can help here, although they are not the only solution.
- Payment and support for participation. Some people might feel insulted at being offered payment to participate. Some might not be able to accept payment because it could complicate their benefits. But there is a strong argument for trying to do so because you are benefiting from significant local experience and insight.
- Basing deliberation on existing, ongoing conversations. Many deliberative activities will be based on long-running local conversations on the same topic (for example, Birmingham’s ongoing conversation about car use). It’s about being willing to look at the ways that people already get together and demonstrating that you are listening to what has already been said. Conversations don’t start from a blank state, and deliberation can help to take the heat out of conversations which may currently be polarised.
- Use of digital tools. There is a risk in concluding that digital solutions will resolve everything; and in assuming that digital is inappropriate because it does not provide space for minority groups. The Hansard Society used a closed online forum to discuss domestic violence in a way that could never have happened in the offline world.

### 4. Evidence from Ben Fowkes (Delib)

#### 4.1 The Chair invited Ben to outline his and Delib’s work.

- Delib is a digital democracy company that makes tech platforms for engaging local people for a large number of organisations;
- The three main products are “Citizen Space”, “Simulator”, and “Dialogue”;
- Delib was founded around 20 years ago; initially it produced satirical content on the web around the 2001 election. Over time its work increasingly become focused on things like argument mapping and crowdsourcing to support individual engagement websites for particular projects. The organisation eventually moved away from this, creating Citizen Space;
- Citizen Space is about allowing organisations to organise and publicise all activity relating to the development of policies and decisions. It allows for meaningful participation, with findings on issues being developed and fed back with responses published, like a more dynamic version of a traditional consultation tool.

#### 4.2 The Chair invited more general discussion. In the course of this Ben made the following points:

- **Social bias.** How consultations are designed, how they are presented, and so on are all critical factors. Political bias is not a huge issue on Citizen Space but might be something that is found in other spaces.
- **Mindset and commitment.** There needs to be a clear strategy around this work, and a sustained commitment from decision-makers. The software is all off the shelf, but it has to be designed to fit existing council processes – understanding the needs of different professionals, mapping existing decision-making systems. Making it work in practice involves learning and adaptation, as every area is different. Presentation, consideration of audience and user need are crucial. Providing feedback on every exercise in a timely way (usually within 90 days) is important. Mindset is key – having the right mentality amongst decision-makers to want to make it work. This is present in Scotland, although Scotland is often cited as an exemplar in this area and the experiences there cannot easily be transposed elsewhere.
- **Accessibility and inclusion.** Basic accessibility standards are the foundation. Accessible content is critically important – you have to build for the 1% who may be excluded first. Participatory approaches ask a lot, and have high barriers for entry in terms of confidence. By doing things online you exclude about 10% of the population but not doing things online also now excludes – and online is significantly cheaper. If you can do most of your engagement through online tools it frees up more resource to focus more expensive, offline activity where it needs to happen. Tech is not the only answer but it can be leveraged to slightly improve things. “Online” doesn’t necessarily reinforce the old social divides – you see a very broad demographic spread.
- **Crowdsourcing.** Can be hugely powerful. Delib supported the Government’s “spending challenge” after the 2010



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election which led to £500 million of cost savings. It is difficult to go out to the public and say you don't have the answers and it is also difficult to commit to using ideas from "outside" the organisation. Bristol's experience here was that a big process to gather ideas was started with commitments made to adopt and implement the best 10 solutions – but outcomes were never followed through.

- **Simulator examples.** Delib's general work in Bristol points to some interesting examples. Things work very well when trying to work out the actual impact of spending, and Simulator has been used by Bristol council for this purpose, requiring officers to produce some quite detailed impact assessments to support the use of the tool. On transport, also in Bristol, Simulator has been used to encourage people to explore trade-offs and hard choices – for example, a points-based system is used for prioritisation, and you can sign up to less palatable things to secure more points to secure other policy outcomes.
- **Innovative practice.** Taiwan is doing very interesting things, as is Hamilton (New Zealand). Kirklees in Yorkshire and Austin (Texas) present interesting examples. Much of the solution lies in creating organisation-wide solutions.

4.3 Ben undertook to send the Commission further information about Delib's work.

### 5. Evidence from Julian McRae (Engage Britain) and Henry Tam

5.1 The Chair invited Julian and Henry to talk about their respective backgrounds.

- Julian advised that he came from a background in think tanks and Whitehall; worlds that tend to prize analysis and underplay experience, particularly lived experience.
- Henry advised that his work has involved drawing people's attention to the wealth of resources already available on the topics of participation and deliberation – the challenge lies in finding sustainable, meaningful solutions.

5.2 The Chair invited more general discussion, in the course of which the following points were made by the witnesses:

- **Inequality in participation.** Success here is about spending time consistently engaging with people – on the doorstep and around where they live. Putting a small amount of resource into this "relational" engagement over a sustained period of time is better than piling significant resource into formal engagement for short term initiatives, and means it will be easier to secure participation from a wider range of people. Using civic leadership – councillors and "community leaders" – is a way of engaging with active and committed people who may be able to feed back to other local people. Speaking the language of a wider range of groups and listening to them by letting them frame and contextualise their own challenges and aspirations is a way to break down barriers, rather than the council going to people with its own views of what the problems and solutions might be. It makes it more likely that people will be able to reach consensus on matters on which they really disagree. If the council has built a reputation for listening then when it deploys more formal approaches to consult, it will yield better results. Staff training is important in this context (as is training for councillors). Dialogue can help to build a shared sense of roles and responsibilities.
- **Practical ways to listen.** Most important is understanding the question for which an answer is sought. This starts right at the beginning, with proper discussion of the actual challenge and how people define and discuss that challenge. Unconscious bias on the part of officials can negatively influence this – bringing more lived experience into the system is important because it challenges this worldview (which can result in poor results when the institution involved refuses to accept that challenge, as in the case of NHS Citizen, and as in the case where social models of disability challenge more traditional medical models). It is worth remembering that ideas that change society don't tend to start in the institutions we have, but instead in the civic environment. Putting officials directly into that conversation is important because through this immersion they will get insights more quickly. Using the people who we often disparagingly term the "usual suspects" can help to encourage participation from a wider segment of the population – and it also recognises the diversity of skillsets. Some people will want to talk and act as advocates – others may not. The council should recognise that while only a small subset of people may want to engage in a certain way, that doesn't mean that the council has to adopt a single set of approaches which might be described as inclusive. Part of listening is

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about establishing and building up trust – making clear at the outset what is up for grabs. This demonstrates why the feedback loop – providing updates and information on involvement and results – is so important.

- **Transparency and commercial confidentiality.** The challenge is to identify the purpose of the transparency – who needs to know what? Government started releasing huge quantities of information which was essentially unusable, so it is necessary to commit to provide information that people need in order to be kept informed, and then listen to how people found and used that information so that we can change and refine if necessary. In large organisations there is huge investment in management information for the purposes of decision-making, but we rarely make the same accommodations for the public. In relation to commercial confidentiality, there is an onus on the council to reflect on the reasons for withholding information. For some things – poor performance, for example – it can be better to release information which reveals a mixed picture rather than to keep things confidential and risk people considering that things are worse than they in fact are.
- **Expert opinion.** It can be easy to dismiss opinions which do not come from experts / academics / researchers. Councils have to understand the kinds of culture which drive this set of behaviours. It comes of a failure to understand that the more analytical approach to policymaking has gone too far in not realising that policymakers bring their own values in. It is about how you frame that discussion – focusing on feelings and reaction rather than inviting people to make judgements on substantive matters which might be technically complex.

### 6. Close of meeting

- 6.1 The Chair and Commission agreed that future evidence hearings would be carried out on 10 January and 29 January, with witnesses to be confirmed in due course.
- 6.2 The meetings ended at 5.03pm.

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## EVIDENCE HEARING 2

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### Newham Democracy Commission Second evidence hearing: note

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|           |                            |
|-----------|----------------------------|
| Attending | Nick Pearce (in the Chair) |
|           | Fahmina Rahman             |
|           | Kush Kanodia               |
|           | Kenny Imafidon             |
|           | Dr Elke Loeffler           |
|           | Carl Miller                |

#### 1. Chair's welcome and introductions

- 1.1 The Chair opened the Commission's second meeting and invited Commission members to introduce themselves.
- 1.2 The Chair explained the focus of the day. He explained that the Commission would be looking at voting and democratic engagement in the morning, and considering co-production in the afternoon.

#### 2. Areeq Chowdhury (WebRoots Democracy) and Joe Mitchell (Democracy Club)

- 2.1 The Chair invited Areeq and Joe to introduce themselves and to explain their work.
- 2.2 Areeq told the Commission that:
  - he started WebRoots Democracy as a volunteer-run think tank to look into voter engagement and participation in local democracy;
  - research has been around online voting in elections (and its associated challenges and opportunities);
  - recent research has also looked at democratic engagement online, and the use of social media.
- 2.3 Joe told the Commission that:
  - he is a director of Democracy Club, a community interest community which benefits from the input of a large number of volunteers to gather and collate information about democracy at a local and national level;
  - the focus of Democracy Club is to make democratic information (around elections in particular) online easier to consume.
- 2.4 The Chair and Commissioners posed questions to Areeq and Joe on the provision of information about local democracy – with a particular focus on how young people consume information, the impacts of a young and diverse borough, and issues around equality and disability in access to and use of information. In the ensuing conversation the following points were made:
  - **Basic information to support participation.** Joe noted that on election days, many of the top search terms that bring people to Democracy Club's website are about basic questions – where and how to vote – which suggests a lack of basic information about simple elements of information, which broadcasters and others in the media have failed to provide in an accessible way. Efforts are not taken before and after elections to explain to people proactively their options and the process; councils limit their activity to the publication of the "statement of persons nominated" when they could do more to introduce the candidates and their positions in more creative ways. This is the gap that Democracy Club are trying to fill.

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- **Voter registration.**
- **More inclusive arrangements for voting.** Areeq noted barriers to voting for disabled people; elections are very inaccessible for many people, but many issues can be easily fixed. Publication of manifestos and other information in accessible formats, and using other creative methods to get information out. Where accessible solutions do exist they may no longer be relevant – for example the provision of Braille templates when many blind people don't read it; also, the option for proxy voting or assistance at the polling station exist, but this takes away independence. Data does not exist which could give insight into the proportion of disabled people who vote, but the council could commission surveys.
- **The rollout of tech and the digital divide.** Joe and Areeq talked about digital skills, Areeq mentioning experiences with digital consensus decision-making in Taiwan. Joe talked about the assumptions that we make about people and their experiences (mentioning the example of “flatpack democracy” in Frome). Most people aren't interested in utopian tools – practical efforts need to be made to make existing parts of the process accessible.
- **The use of a wider range of tools for local democracy.** Areeq advised that participatory budgeting provides an interesting model for framing challenges around allocating resources in a local area. Joe highlighted work in Paris (working on schools), on voter advice applications (VAAs) – especially in Germany – and of civic and political education.
- **Drawing in those who feel excluded.** Areeq said that 60% of voters didn't vote because of trust and engagement; for the remainder it's a “lack of time”. Better communication could encourage people to care more. Joe said that some of the cultural and psychological elements are overlooked, with the tendency to focus on more crude demographic terms. Areeq and Joe said that much depends on identifying the distinct characteristics of those “left behind”. Areeq advised that, for young people, encouragement to vote needed to take the form of going where young people already are – as well as engaging with those well under 18. Areeq noted that political discussion often happened online in “closed” spaces like private Facebook groups, and that embedding the council in these spaces (and vice versa) might provide an opportunity for engagement. Fundamentally, the burden of responsibility should lie on councillors to better understand how to engage to represent people better – which may involve broadening the pool of those willing to put themselves forward for elected office.
- **Concrete ideas for change.** The Commission challenges Areeq and Joe to identify straightforward, more ambitious and most transformative approaches to improve local democracy. Areeq and Joe highlighted:
  - o Short term: requesting a trial for online voting from the Cabinet Office; when candidates are nominated for a by-election, collecting a statement from each about why they want to be elected and publish in a machine readable way;
  - o More ambitious: encouraging people to stand in elections, incentivising the most marginalised people; taking action on civic education;
  - o Transformative: establish a permanent council of randomly selected citizens (as operates in Flanders and Madrid) – which could help to solve the legitimacy problem; understanding that people's expectations on voting and democratic engagement in 10 or 20 years time will make current practices (things like postal voting) increasingly anachronistic, and hence developing policy solutions accordingly).

### 2.5 The Chair invited questions and comments from members of the public in attendance. The following points were raised:

- The appropriateness of Facebook as an engagement mechanism given its outlook and approach to doing business. Joe advised that many people are on Facebook and that it makes sense to go where people are – but that councils also have access to public spaces that they could also use better for engagement;
- The possibility of introducing a legal requirement to vote;
- The need to demonstrate to local people why engaging will make a difference – and how the council should support activism at a local level. The council's own culture with respect to advocacy and activism needs to be addressed;
- The possibility of a mentoring scheme for young councillors, and others otherwise underrepresented;
- The need, more generally, for a more diverse pool of election candidates.

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### 3. Simon Woolley (Operation Black Vote)

3.1 The Chair invited Simon Woolley to speak briefly on OBV's history and its work in agitating for more BAME engagement in political life, and mentoring future politicians at a national and local level.

3.2 Simon explained to the Commission OBV's background, it having been set up in response to Black marginalisation in the 1980s. He advised that OBV had been engaged in three key activities:

- Political education (helping people to understand where power lies, how it works and how to access it);
- Political participation (active involvement by BAME people in the political process);
- Political representation (encouraging BAME people to stand for public office).

3.3 Simon told the Commission that:

- BAME people should be around the decision-making table (e.g. in criminal justice, where Black communities acutely understand the injustices within the system, and in higher education, and in employment, where a significant pay gap exists);
- OBV is targeting the need for empowering and transforming institutions – based on commitments that the former Prime Minister Theresa May made to audit the commitment to change across Whitehall.

3.4 The Chair and Commissioners engaged Simon in discussion, in the course of which the following points were made:

- **Institutional racism.** This presents a huge challenge to engagement. Local areas can drive change because they provide a way to translate a huge problem into something more tangible that you can do something with – for example, by engaging in schools (including primary schools) – which can include governing bodies and teachers;
- The risk of merely engaging those already engaged. The Commission wanted to understand whether there was a risk that, in creating new avenues to engagement, those using those routes would be those already inclined to have an interest in politics, thereby inadvertently deepening inequality. Simon advises that the purpose of engaging is finding those ready to exercise leadership positions and encouraging them with mentoring, thereby creating specific pathways for those who are not “ordinary” candidates. This can be expensive and requires leadership to commit to. You need a long term conveyor belt of talent;
- **Tokenism.** Simon advised that people must be challenged to go on a genuine journey to promote inclusivity. It is not about the politics of the begging bowl, but about understanding power, making demands and using political leverage to make it clear that those currently in leadership positions have to take concerted action. Challenging tokenism is about looking for statements of intent – a demonstration that people are truly serious. This will often involve the identifying of significant low hanging fruit – there are projects that can be taken off the shelf and delivered, people who could be put into leadership positions now;
- **Peer support.** Twinning future leaders with present leaders is about succession planning.

3.5 The Chair invited questions and comments from members of the public in attendance. The following points were raised:

- People in power may have a disconnect with local people. Simon advised that this is where robust conversations with council leadership may be necessary – highlighting the need for challenge and for local people to act as critical friends. Your participation serves those in power as much as it serves you;
- Ensuring that those in leadership positions in BAME communities act in the interests of those wider communities. Simon highlighted the need for people to be aware of inequality and intersectionalities and the need for communities to nurture and build their own talent, to avoid people in leadership positions being those most interested in themselves;

3.6 Simon concluded by imploring the Commission to be brave, bold and to make those necessary demands that local people clearly needed to be addressed.

3.7 The Chair agreed that action would be taken to ensure that the Commission had access to more information on the leadership mentoring programme that Simon had mentioned.

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### 4. Melissa Mean (Knowle West Arts), Daisy Froud (Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL)

- 4.1 The Chair invited Melissa and Daisy to talk about their experiences with co-production, with a particular focus on how public agencies work in mutual and equal ways with the citizens served in local areas, particularly in respect of regeneration.
- 4.2 Daisy advised that she worked as a consultant, work which involved participatory design in the production of the built environment. She also teaches on the history and theory of producing the built environment in a more collaborative way.
- 4.3 Melissa advised that her experience came from work carried out in an area of Bristol, Knowle West, where art has been used as a technique to assist in the co-production with local people of novel approaches to regeneration a low-density housing estate.
- 4.4 The Chair and other Commissioners engaged Melissa and Daisy in a discussion in the course of which the following points were made:
- **Overall themes in co-production.** Effective co-production is about working at the start of projects rather than consultation at a later stage – this involves actively thinking about power relations. A lot of the time – especially in regeneration – practise encourages the opposite approach to co-production. The assumption is made that external “experts” have to be brought in to “fix” a situation. Co-production of everything is possible, but making it work is about community and council capacity as well as the cultural fear and anxiety over perceived risks;
  - **Experimentation.** There is no single approach that will work. Melissa advised that starting smaller and working up – recognising that you don’t have all the answers, and that you need to be vulnerable – will make things more sustainable;
  - **Power relations.** Melissa advised that in Knowle West, art was used as a way to blur power imbalances, to engage in conversations in a different way. This was about using art of map housing needs and aspirations, and resources. Experimentation is less scary than trying to make permanent changes all at once – co-production has a big emphasis on prototyping. Good co-production should have a low floor but a high ceiling – being easy to engage with, and allowing people to develop into deep technical expertise if they have the interest and capacity to do so. In order to make this happen, political leadership and statements of intent are important. Councils might fund posts to build capacity or otherwise invest in order to bring people together. A shared set of priorities makes for a more sophisticated relationship between local people and a council. There can be challenges in working with groups where the council/public relationship is more adversarial – people do have long memories and you have to work hard to overcome wariness. Trust grows slowly;
  - **Consensus isn’t always the goal.** Daisy advised that she was cynical of the idea of “consensus” because it often happens because people have stopped engaging. Conflict and disagreement is key to finding creative solutions to problems. At the end people may not be happy with the solution but they will accept that the process leading to that solution has been fair. The aim should be to dissolve the barrier between the council and the citizen – so co-production on its own can’t equalise the power imbalance, it requires the council to change its own internal ways of working;
  - **Co-production in regeneration and masterplanning.** Daisy advised that in her experience the fundamental feature was the council letting go and allowing local people to make decisions themselves – often facilitated by a third party commissioned to provide support;
  - **Sustaining change.** When this action still feels top-down, when funding disappears the co-production activity will too. This presents challenges when dealing with projects which requiring ongoing revenue commitment to fund. The development of business plans and other activity to make local action sustainable forms an important part of the design process
  - **Examples of good practice in co-production.** Melissa and Daisy mentioned:
    - o Bologna (involved two or three years of experimentation before a more formal framework for co-production was put in place);
    - o Barcelona, and other Spanish cities;
    - o The People’s Plan for the Royal Docks produced with the GLC in the 1980s is a good local historical example.



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4.5 The Chair invited Aiden Keightley, Newham's Co-production Manager, to speak briefly from the audience about Newham's current practice around co-production. Aiden advised that:

- There is a co-production group for children which works alongside parents;
- Co-production has been a feature of policymaking around adult social care since 2007;
- In total Newham has carried out 185 projects involving co-production;
- Effective co-production is about equality and the recognition that all have a skillset that they can bring – reciprocity and recognition of different people's skillset is important.

4.6 The Chair noted that other prospective witnesses whom the Commission had hoped would have been able to speak on issues related to co-production had not been available to speak to the Commission on the date of the hearing, and that steps were being taken to gather evidence from them separately, which would be made public.

### 5. Rachael Farrington (Voting Counts), and Emmanuel Gotor and Alistair Rooms (Citizens UK / TELCO)

5.1 The Chair invited Rachael, Emmanuel and Alistair to speak briefly about their work and experience.

5.2 Rachael advised that she had set up Voting Counts as a website in 2014 when still at school, in the runup to that year's European Parliamentary Elections. She had discovered that no central resource existed for young people and others to find unbiased information about voting. She is now attempting to expand the site to encompass local politics.

5.3 Emmanuel explained the structure and approach of Citizens UK, its relationship with TELCO (bringing together local people across East London) and, more specifically, Newham Citizens and the Newham Alliance. CUK had in particular been responsible for the success of the original Living Wage campaign. CUK works by learning about impacts on community, with intelligence being aggregated and voting taking place on issues which are taken forward for wider campaigning. The emphasis is on local community power and building relationships.

5.4 The Chair and Commissioners engaged the witnesses in discussion, in the course of which the following points were made:

- **Links between local politics and community organising.** Emmanuel advised that historically the relationship had been antagonistic. Community power has been seen as a threat to political leadership. Alistair advised that things had seemed to have changed in Newham more recently at both an officer and council level. Space is opening up for collaboration;
- **Political and civic education.** Rachael advised that civic education in schools can be quite poor. Education is about recognising that everything is political. It's about public awareness that if they're not happy then an election is an opportunity to hold people to turn out. It's necessary to link the issues that people care about, because people often don't care about "politics" on its own;
- **The process and method of participation.** Not everyone is involved in democratic action. Different approaches are needed for different things – low wages, housing, safety and gang activity; modern slavery. The concentration of power in a small number of people's hands is an issue; in Newham, many people have little capacity to be involved. Effective processes also require transparency;
- **Communication and relationships.** There is a need for clear communication by decision-makers as well as for recognition by councils for the work that local people undertake. Tangible results must be fed back.

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## 6. Comments from the public

6.1 The Chair invited closing comments from members of the public. These included:

- The view that the Commission's work itself (including the hearing) should have involved more opportunity for the voice of local people to lead it;
- That the views of a more diverse range of residents should be crucial as the Commission's evidence gathering continues;
- That the risks of community groups are seen as an obstacle – particularly inasmuch as that the council does not go out to the community enough;
- That the territory of community activity is defined by boundaries that the council sets rather than being worked up at a community level.
- That the Council's repairs and maintenance services should be governed by tenants, staff representatives and the council.

6.2 The Chair closed the meeting, thanking those present for attending. He advised that the next formal evidence gathering session would be held on 29 January.

# Appendices

## EVIDENCE HEARING 3

### Newham Democracy Commission

#### Third evidence hearing: note

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|           |                            |
|-----------|----------------------------|
| Attending | Nick Pearce (in the Chair) |
|           | Fahmina Rahman             |
|           | Kush Kanodia               |
|           | Dr Elke Loeffler           |

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#### 1. Chair's welcome and introductions

- 1.1 The Chair opened the Commission's third meeting and invited Commission members to introduce themselves.
- 1.2 The Chair explained the focus of the day. He explained that the Commission would be looking at the role of councillors, and council governance, with a particular focus on the role of directly elected Mayors.

#### 2. Kate Herbert (Local Government Association) and Jonathan Carr-West (Local Government Information Unit)

- 2.1 The Chair invited Kate and Jonathan to introduce themselves and to explain their work.
- 2.2 Kate explained the role of the Local Government Association. It is a membership organisation for English councils, which acts as a national voice for the local government sector. It also provides improvement support for councils. Jonathan explained that LGiU is also a membership organisation, which provides support and representation to its members on innovation.
- 2.3 The Chair and others Commissioners discussed matters relating to council governance and councillors in general in the course of which the following points were made:
- **Trends in London and nationwide on governance reform.** Kate advised that London presents a mixed picture, with 4 councils using the Mayoral system, 4 using the committee system, and the remainder using leader/cabinet. Kate and Jonathan agreed that there is no complete evidence to say which is the best system; that the culture of the council is most important, and the way in which it works in practice. So the priority any system places on involving councillors, and local people is more important than the structural change. Often frustrations with a particular governance model end with the change of structure rather than addressing these wider cultural issues. Jonathan advised that this discussion occurs in an unusual governance context, with a patchwork of different models across the country and a highly centralised system. Meaningful discussion around public service reform and governance have lagged in this context, even where modernisation continues in other areas. Jonathan said that whatever system you have the role of councillors is crucial – as is developing an understanding of communities, which he described as “deep hanging out”, to get a more fundamental sense of what local people need;
  - **Innovation.** Kate advised that Barking and Dagenham is currently recalibrating the way that that council works around local people, and changes in how the organisation as a whole operates. In Bristol, participatory processes were used for putting in place new ways of working, with capital funding being channelled into that process. Wigan has been rethinking the role of the council and of local people. Jonathan highlighted that in being democratic institutions, councils are unique, and don't necessarily always go together with non-democratic local institutions like the NHS and (to an extent) the police – sometimes they pull in different directions. There has been innovation in this area – but also marginal fiddling, and all in the context of austerity;
  - **National and international experiences.** Jonathan advised that there is an important caveat about taking learning from elsewhere and using it – although there are demographic similarities in some other parts of the world. Jonathan advised that Melbourne is carrying out work to reinvent local democracy;

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- **Local government's duties and responsibilities.** Jonathan advised that even on the issues which local government can influence, the room for movement is very limited. People don't know what councillors do – people care about streets being safe and clean, about their local areas, about jobs – and councils do have a critical role in this. The “warp and weft” of everyday life is local government – as is some of the big global trends around climate change and new technology. Real decisions on these issues are made in the Town Hall and not Whitehall – if we can tell that story better then people can and should be engaged with that;
- **Trends in involvement and place-shaping.** Kate advised that there is a need to think bigger than just the council – trends in involving local people need to be about working with local people (sometimes to find “least worst” options), and influencing other services and place-shaping. The Chair mentioned the Bristol Council “one city plan” in this context.

### 2.4 The Chair invited comments and questions from members of the public. The following issues were raised and discussed with witnesses:

- The influence of party politics on the future of local government;
- The presence of a crisis of trust, led by a crisis of information caused by the collapse of local journalism and its capacity to hold councils to account through proper scrutiny. Jonathan agreed, saying that it was difficult to understand how this very complex issue was developing. He said that there was a huge spread in disinformation using private WhatsApp and Facebook groups, meaning that the ability of people to challenge disinformation is limited;
- The need for local people to be able to hold councillors to account. Kate advised that there has been an overarching shift in the sense of what councils are for, which has influenced a shift in public expectations around what information ought to be available, and how they can influence decisions. Jonathan advised that central government does not care about local government, with no coherent national policy on the subject;
- The need for influence over other services – for example transport.

### 3. Cllr Tom Coole (Gloucester City Council), Ruth Breidenbach-Roe (Locality), Professor Colin Copus (De Montfort University)

#### 3.1 The Chair invited the panel of witnesses to introduce themselves and their work.

- Ruth explained that Locality was a membership body for community organisations, looking at localism and delivering support programmes around community rights. Locality has set up a commission chaired by Lord Bob Kerslake to look at associated issues;
- Tom said that he was a local councillor in Gloucester who had won the 2018 LGiU Young Councillor of the Year award;
- Colin advised that he was an academic with a long background of research in local government; in 2017, with others he produced the report “The Voice of the Councillor”, summarising views from councillors around the country about their roles.

#### 3.2 The Chair and other Commissioners discussed issues relating to councillors' roles and responsibility, and councils' governance options in the course of which the following issues were discussed:

- **Councillors' general role.** Colin said that the role was about questioning, challenging, critiquing, and influencing wider institutions – a real shift from the “internal” stuff connected to the council, towards something more about the place. Tom explained the duality between being a councillor in the community versus a councillor at the council. Councillors are able to bring a level of honesty and bluntness that others can't to these conversations in the community. Councillors are also sometimes treated as an inconvenience. The role is shifting as, in some places, officers support has been cut and councillors have to move into those spaces, being more proactive in seeking out information and taking action. Tom advised that councillors have a role in joining people up;
- **Councillors as community voices, and parishing.** Ruth advised that community chests and other small pots of money available for action action project can be used by local areas. Ruth also mentioned parishing, and the value of parishing in having an institution at neighbourhood level that helps power to “stick”. Tom agreed, advising that parishing provides a way to get more clout for areas where community action might currently look more informal. Colin

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advised that institutions are better at talking to other institutions than they are to community organisations, which may be another argument in favour of parishing. There was a discussion about councillors as community “enablers”, and whether councillors’ roles as problem-solvers could cause problems for future engagement – ie, needing to make that relationship feel less transactional. Ruth cited the “Wigan Deal” as an obvious example of attempts to shift the relationship. There was a discussion on the role of councillors as arbitrators between matters of local contention;

- **Politics.** Colin advised that until May 2019 the vast majority of local councillors belonged to national political parties – this is not mirrored elsewhere in Europe. The figure has started to shift slightly, with more independents
- **Current governance systems.** Colin explained the attractions of the Mayoral model, including higher name recognition and action to “boost” local economies. Colin also highlighted the benefits of the ward focus of many local councils, and councillors;
- **Councillors’ use of information.** There was a discussion about the trend in some places for councillors to need to use the Freedom of Information Act to access information about their own authority. This, and resource challenges, present real challenges for overstretched councillors. Councillor training may need to be a feature here – Tom advised that training has never been proactively offered to him, and that councillors tend to be quite bad at understanding their own needs here. Colin advised that training and development might be needed around networking and sharing experiences – when austerity began, these kinds of budgets for councillor training were one of the first things to be cut;

### 3.3 The Chair invited questions and comments from members of the public.

- An attempt had been made to establish a parish council in Limehouse – the attempt failed, highlighting three problems:
  - o The council dislikes the idea of parish councils;
  - o Parishes are actually quite constrained as, given the precept, they are not in a position to do much;
  - o There is susceptibility to hijacking by special interests.
- There might need to be more publicity on the council role;
- People may think of themselves as “consumers of services” – the idea of citizenship may feel alien;
- The role of trades unions needs to be looked at;
- The fact that Newham is a 100% Labour borough may have an impact on councillors’ roles. Tom advised that this was difficult to get around without changing the electoral system;
- Overall, representativeness needs to be looked at. Colin advised that the most underrepresented group in politics are those not members of political parties – hearing other voices involves opening up a debate. Ruth spoke on citizens’ assemblies and their need to be representative.

## 4. Robin Hambleton (University of the West of England), Ben Rogers (Centre for London)

### 4.1 The Chair invited Robin and Ben to introduce themselves.

### 4.2 Robin explained his background in academic research on Mayors – in England and elsewhere. Ben explained his role at the Centre for London, investigating big policy challenges for cities.

### 4.3 The Chair and Commissioners discussed issues relating to the roles and responsibilities of directly elected Mayors. This included discussion on the following issues:

- **Contextual differences between Mayors in England.** Robin advised that much rests on the model – the visibility of Mayors is generally down to powers. In England, local government is enfeebled, but visibility elsewhere is huge. Ben advised that the logic behind the introduction of Mayors was new blood, more stability and more accountability – evidence from 2012 supports the contention that Mayors have delivered that. Ben highlighted that there is some confusion between the “executive” Mayoral role and the “ceremonial” role of Mayors in other councils, suggesting that we may need to find a different name. Robin highlighted that it was important to talk about the Mayoral models, plural, as there was more than one extant in England;
- **Examples of Mayoralties in English cities – at local level.** Robin highlighted the example of George Ferguson

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in Bristol, and the work that he and his successor have done to raise the visibility of the city. In particular, Bristol can demonstrate success in using community action to combat the impact of significant funding cuts since 2010. That said, the Mayoral model is comparatively unpopular. Councillors can see their role as weakened by the model – but there are opportunities to develop different councillor roles in Mayoral governance. Ben highlighted the possibility of linking tackling neighbourhood challenges with a strengthened and more inclusive Mayoral system;

- **Examples of Mayoralities in English cities – at combined authority level.** The CA model for accountability is dependent on local authority systems;
- **Neighbourhood governance and innovation.** Ben advised that, in London, such structures have not traditionally existed. Councillors could help to populate and support pop-up parishes and improvement districts – there was a need to create a light touch, fleet of foot neighbourhood governance model without going down formal, fixed routes for parishes;
- **Ensuring that formal governance better reflects the local population.** Most Mayors have been white men – Robin advised that attempts were being made to bring in more BAME people in a variety of places;
- **Party politics and the presence of “place”.** The Mayoral model presents opportunities for collaboration – eg Bristol’s rainbow cabinet. But Robin highlighted that danger of a single “autocratic” person being seen to run things – there was a need to develop the leadership capacity of the whole place. This raises the possibility of thinking about the governance of large, new regeneration sites – developing estate management with proper participation. Designed in from the beginning, architects might start to design and develop estates in different ways.

- 4.4 The Chair invited questions and comments from members of the public. These included the comment that Mayors, by definition, were said to work against community involvement – they are chosen by a selectorate and are not really democratically elected.

### 5. Aileen Murphy (National Audit Office)

- 5.1 The Chair invited Aileen to introduce herself and her work. Aileen advised that as Head of Local Government at the National Audit Office, her role involved holding to account the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as the “steward” of the local government system. She highlighted research in 2019 on local governance carried out by the NAO – attempting to understand what was happening on governance in evidential terms.
- 5.2 The Chair and Commission engaged in discussion with Aileen on the subject of local authority governance in the course of which some of the following issues were discussed:
- **Funding cuts.** Generally, London Boroughs did not experience the biggest revenue cuts, but some experienced cuts up to 40%. The more grant dependent councils were the ones experiencing the biggest cuts. This sits in the context of the presence of incentive-based funding e.g. around business rates and the New Homes Bonus. At a sector level, by the end of 19/20 spending power overall will have dropped by 30%. This means that significant savings still need to be made – the only flexibility councils have is around reserves, which provides some headroom. Risk in the system around finances and resilience are increased by cuts to funding of scrutiny functions. The fiscal situation remains delicate – we have to assume that there won’t be new money coming. There are a trio of issues to consider here:
    - o The fair funding review with its new formula – will Newham be a winner or a loser?
    - o The spending review overall;
    - o Connecting this to the role and aspirations of the Mayor
  - **Council powers.** Councils can do any activities which are legal, which opens up interesting opportunities in structural terms, around more entrepreneurial activity (which may include buying up commercial property);
  - **Ways to combat governance pressure and promote fiscal prudence.** Aileen mentioned scrutiny, and the need for the council’s “golden triangle” of statutory officers to work well and speak truth to power. Novel activities need to avoid conflicts of interest, and be effective. Spinning out trading companies or large investments in special purpose vehicles all need serious scrutiny. Councils need a clear understanding of their financial position – led by clear, regular reporting to a



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finance committee and to full Council, and paying attention to the role of external auditors. A properly resourced finance team, and internal audit function, will need to work based on a “risk map” of the authority informed by the presence of internal controls. Revenue generation plans need to be stress tested – but there is a need for more social innovation and experimentation, evaluating current approaches and systems;

- **Members’ roles.** Principally these lie around scrutiny and around audit committees;
- **Social capital.** Local people are doing more to pick up where councils have been forced to step back – e.g. unpaid carers doing more hours. There has been some retreat from partnership working back into individual institutions but there is now renewed pressure, through funding, to revitalise it – integration in adult social care for example;
- **Place-based accountability.** This will be a challenge when much is silo driven, and difficult to break down. The attitude to devolution is different across Whitehall;
- **Climate change.** There was a discussion on the economics and incentives around more sustainable investment.

### 5.3 The Chair invited questions and comments from members of the public.

- How feasible is it to increase transparency to allow for local people to input before risk and failure occur? Aileen advises that the role of a council’s s151 officer is critical here – as was made clear in the Northamptonshire BVI report, there is no excuse for “doing boring well”. She highlighted the experience of Lambeth People’s Audit as a bottom-up method for local people to assert accountability on finances. On transparency more generally – and on regeneration in particular – making things like viability assessments public would help;
- Is there scope for simplification of local government accounts? Aileen agreed that the usability of these documents to local people had to be considered more.

## 6. Moira Gibb (Independent Chair, Croydon Governance Commission)

6.1 The Chair invited Moira Gibb to introduce herself and to explain more about her ongoing work in Croydon. Moira advised that Croydon had been spending 15 months reviewing their governance and democratic arrangements. In general, people tend to tinker with governance arrangements without considering the effects on the whole system. In Croydon, only a small proportion of councillors have a formal “job” – the council wanted to revisit this and to see how the council could in process review how it does participation.

### 6.2 Moira advised on the key components of the Croydon Commission’s work:

- o They gathered evidence from the borough and beyond, including carrying out a survey of local residents;
- o There was a particular level of dissatisfaction amongst elected members with existing systems;
- o There was a recognition that being a local councillor is an extremely difficult job, with less recognition and status that was afforded to it, say, 20 years ago;
- o Public participation in the review has been very limited – it has been designed as a councillor-led process;
- o The review has considered issues such as how councillors effectively hold to account and the role of political parties;
- o The biggest issue for councillors was access to timely information – there is an information and an interest gap both in respect of councillors and the wider public;
- o Discussion of the committee system was a key component: councillors visited Wandsworth to consider their model;
- o The independence of scrutiny was a strong theme, along with collaboration and partnership;
- o The most important outcome was the understanding that structures are much less important than culture.

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### APPENDIX 4: COUNCILLOR SURVEY FINDINGS

The below is an anonymised summary of answers to substantive questions posed in the councillor survey, omitting answers that might reveal personal information.

How would you describe your day-to-day work on the council? Please look at the following descriptions and consider how accurately they describe what you do now. Tick as many boxes as you like

| ANSWER CHOICES   | RESPONSES |    |
|--|-----------|----|
| Helping people with individual problems - things like individual issues with housing maintenance, benefits, immigration matters, etc | 96.43%    | 27 |
| Campaigning locally on things of importance to your local community  | 82.14%    | 23 |
| Supporting local causes in other ways  | 78.57%    | 22 |
| Sitting on council scrutiny committees   | 53.57%    | 15 |
| Sitting on council planning and/or licensing committees  | 53.57%    | 15 |
| Making decisions (ie being in a leadership position)   | 60.71%    | 17 |
| <b>Total Respondents: 28</b>   |           |    |

What things would you like to be able to do more of?

| ANSWER CHOICES   | RESPONSES |    |
|--|-----------|----|
| Helping people with individual problems - things like individual issues with housing maintenance, benefits, immigration matters, etc | 53.57%    | 15 |
| Campaigning locally on things of importance to your local community  | 64.29%    | 18 |
| Supporting local causes in other ways  | 17.86%    | 5  |
| Sitting on council scrutiny committees   | 25.00%    | 7  |
| Sitting on council planning and/or licensing committees  | 21.43%    | 6  |
| Making decisions (ie being in a leadership position)   | 71.43%    | 20 |
| <b>Total Respondents: 28</b>   |           |    |

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To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

|  | <b>STRONGLY<br/>AGREE</b>  | <b>AGREE</b>               | <b>NEITHER<br/>AGREE<br/>NOR<br/>DISAGREE</b> | <b>DISAGREE</b>           | <b>STRONGLY<br/>DISAGREE</b> | <b>TOTAL</b> |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|---|---------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| The council is accountable to local people                                 | <b>46.43%</b><br><b>13</b> | <b>32.14%</b><br><b>9</b>  | <b>7.14%</b><br><b>2</b>                      | <b>14.29%</b><br><b>4</b> | <b>0.00%</b><br><b>0</b>     | <b>28</b>    |
| The council has set a clear direction for local area                       | <b>32.14%</b><br><b>9</b>  | <b>35.71%</b><br><b>10</b> | <b>17.86%</b><br><b>5</b>                     | <b>10.71%</b><br><b>3</b> | <b>3.57%</b><br><b>1</b>     | <b>28</b>    |
| The political leadership of the council is accountable to councillors      | <b>46.43%</b><br><b>13</b> | <b>28.57%</b><br><b>8</b>  | <b>3.57%</b><br><b>1</b>                      | <b>10.71%</b><br><b>3</b> | <b>10.71%</b><br><b>10</b>   | <b>28</b>    |
| The senior officer leadership of the council is accountable to councillors | <b>46.43%</b><br><b>13</b> | <b>14.29%</b><br><b>4</b>  | <b>14.29%</b><br><b>4</b>                     | <b>14.29%</b><br><b>4</b> | <b>10.71%</b><br><b>13</b>   | <b>28</b>    |
| The council is transparent   | <b>21.43%</b><br><b>6</b>  | <b>35.71%</b><br><b>19</b> | <b>21.43%</b><br><b>6</b>                     | <b>17.86%</b><br><b>5</b> | <b>3.57%</b><br><b>1</b>     | <b>28</b>    |
| The council is responsive to local people's needs                          | <b>25.00%</b><br><b>7</b>  | <b>25.00%</b><br><b>7</b>  | <b>25.00%</b><br><b>7</b>                     | <b>21.43%</b><br><b>6</b> | <b>3.57%</b><br><b>1</b>     | <b>28</b>    |
| I know and understand how decisions are made and by whom                   | <b>39.29%</b><br><b>11</b> | <b>46.43%</b><br><b>13</b> | <b>10.71%</b><br><b>3</b>                     | <b>3.57%</b><br><b>1</b>  | <b>0.00%</b><br><b>0</b>     | <b>28</b>    |
| I am able to influence how decisions are made                              | <b>28.57%</b><br><b>8</b>  | <b>21.45%</b><br><b>6</b>  | <b>28.57%</b><br><b>8</b>                     | <b>10.71%</b><br><b>3</b> | <b>10.71%</b><br><b>3</b>    | <b>28</b>    |
| I am able to challenge how and what decisions are made                     | <b>32.14%</b><br><b>9</b>  | <b>14.29%</b><br><b>6</b>  | <b>28.57%</b><br><b>8</b>                     | <b>10.71%</b><br><b>3</b> | <b>14.29%</b><br><b>4</b>    | <b>28</b>    |

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### How might local people be encouraged to play an active role in local politics and local democracy?

This might be things like encouraging people from different backgrounds to become councillors, trying to promote voting in elections in colleges and workplaces, or the council or party carrying out activity relating to political education.

- o Strong political parties and strong trade unions
- o Some feel there is no point as they will not be listened to
- o Agree with suggestions made. Need to do more face to face engagement not a reliance on digital consultations.
- o More education
- o Get elected? Political education
- o Better engagement from politician and political education programs.
- o Citizen assemblies
- o Encourage people from minority ethnic background to be councillors and conduct seminars on council finances i.e ring-fenced accounts so residents are aware of the restrictions on council finances
- o Hold information sessions, make selection rigorous but also provide training to candidates for that. It is important as councillors who are ultimately responsible to taxpayers to be the best possible representatives which means we need to encourage the most talented and committed people.
- o More open forums for key service areas to engage, explain and garner views.
- o By seeing things they want being achieved. But I often think people only get involved when they see things going wrong. Most people are happy if they believe the services they get are relevant and well delivered. Council's are often influenced by a small but vocal hyper minority.
- o Better engagement with local residents
- o 1. join a political party. 2. encouraging residents i.e, BAME and female to be more proactive in their communities
- o Political activities, documentaries
- o I am positive about the citizen assemblies, and the working groups.  
Where I feel we lack transparency and participation is in planning and licencing. I got idea would be to have work shops like CA around what business/festivals/new builds you would like in the area.
- o Yes I agree with this. I don't think the citizens assemblies work. They are not representative of the communities we wish to serve. Generally people who attend these forums are often engaged in politics. The mayor has mentioned several times that she is not happy with comms and I agree and I think we should use more of modern media to reach out to groups which are often hard to reach.
- o More work on explaining decision making
- o Through local Community events we talk to our residents who are from different Community group and encourage them to participate in election and join our political party. Take part in local activities attend our citizen assembly meetings raise their concerns that may effects them.
- o There has definitely been a positive shift in the opportunities for people to get involved in shaping decisions that affect their lives. It would be good if people from a wider range of backgrounds were involved in politics locally including African men and people from eastern Europe.
- o Showing importance of the role politics in local decision making, community engagement and promotion particularly in ethnic minority community, raising political awareness in youth.
- o Greater involvement in younger people approaching voting age. More resident and community groups linked into the council.
- o Participatory budget setting sessions, more citizen assemblies. Greater diversity of people becoming councillors not just from one community.
- o Council needs to improve its communications, and announcements need to be decipherable
- o All of those plus teaching children at school about how local councils work
- o Proportional representation would allow for a much more varied political scene in Newham. The problem with a majority system is it allows 40% of voters to elect all the councilors. There needs to be a much closer link between voting intention and representation on the council.

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- o They might get involved in citizen's assemblies which ultimately don't carry many funds or much power. Their best bet is to form a campaign group with which to lobby the Council executive through a very public campaign.
- o Through Local development programme that would target and approach articulate, effective activists with right principles rather than limiting our fishing pool to those who put themselves forward

### **The Commission is focusing particularly on the needs of young people. Do you think that there are specific things that the council could do to encourage their involvement, in addition to what you have written above?**

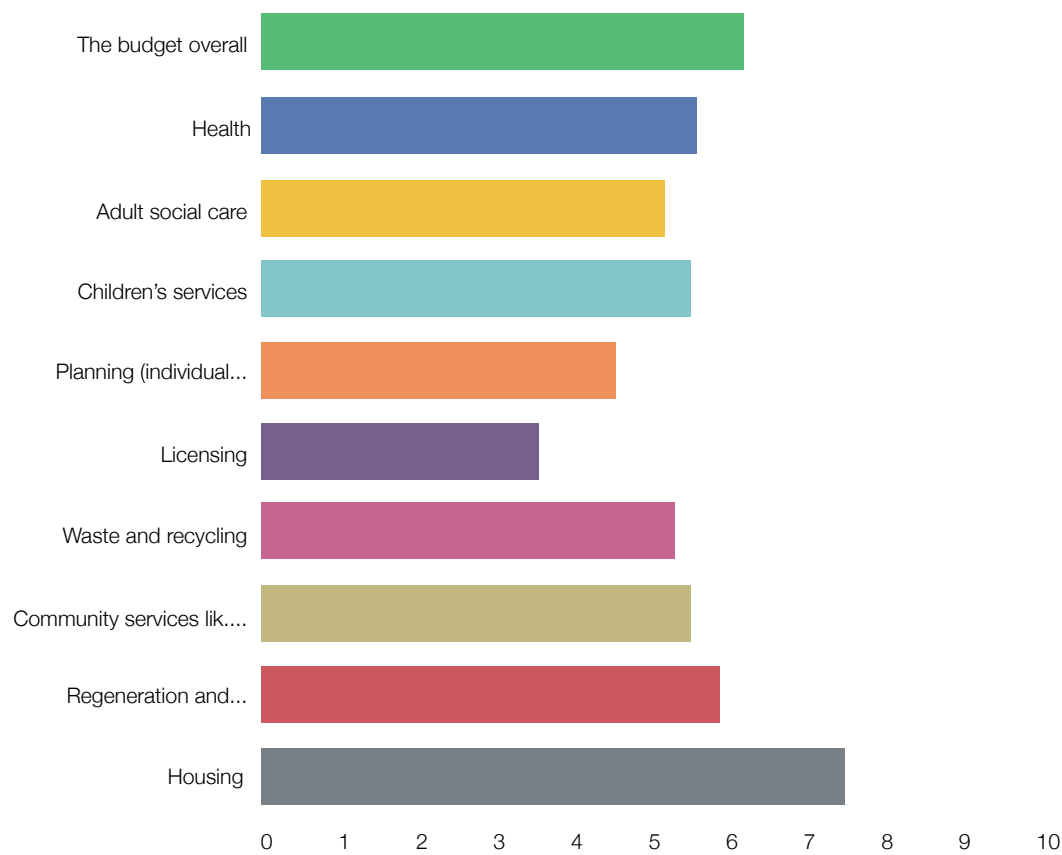
- o Help with safety
- o Improve their moral compass so they can resist gangs. Make them aware of gang grooming methods.
- o Greater awareness in schools
- o Youth council and young mayor
- o Promote Youth HUBs and Activities
- o Consistent engagement with young residents with young councillors.
- o Young people especially young councillors have felt bullied within party structures where gatekeepers continue to use factional tactics to keep young people away. This needs to change and can only happen through party leadership
- o Engage at Schools and Colleges.
- o It's easy to find most young people. Most of them are in school or further education establishments. We need to work better with schools and encourage participation through schools. We also need to work with people who work with young people - sports coaches, churches etc.
- o Untie the financial restraints and invest in the youth
- o More activities for them but they need to tell which activities they want
- o Yes we need to look at the transitory nature of people coming in and out, not just the young people that were born/schooled in the borough. Things like a Tennant's pack when someone signed up for council tax with information on rubbish collection, council services and opportunities.
- o Making the council's website better and more Intuit, but also physical adverts around targeted stations and bus stops that we know have high visibility in young people would help.

### **Reaching out to the various sports/scouts/ cadets engages people outside the school hours and will have better landing**

- o Yes, I don't think the council is making enough use of its young councillors. I am a young person, went to school in the Borough and have a lot of links with your young people. I think rather than using the organisation to reach out to young people. Use the young influencer types and actually provide young people with the tools to be engaged. I think the council lacks an understanding that lots of our young people are in fact parents to their own parents, and should speak more about it. I know from personal experience it would be helpful if the council acknowledged things like that to make it more relatable. For example there was a recent money workshop it wasn't well advertised and perhaps should have been catered to more young people with the recognition that some of their parents English is not their first language etc.
- o Young mayor elections in schools
- o Yes I strongly feel that we need to have a continuous dialogues with them, involve them by giving some responsibility e.g young mayor should have a youth parliament, more youth centres, more young volunteers.more engagement through political workshops, debate etc
- o The council could work more closely with schools within the borough to increase levels of political education and to encourage young people to get involved with influencing the decisions that affect their lives
- o Giving them role in community, recognising their contribution, empowering them as well as providing platforms for them.
- o Greater opportunities to feed into council policy. Youth Parliament type events
- o Involve schools and consult the student body about what they, the children want from the council and how it can be achieved.
- o Compulsory political training in 5th year and lower 6th explaining different political roles and principles that unpin different parties

# Appendices

**Q10 What kinds of areas for which the council is responsible do you think local people might want and expect to have more of a say in? Please choose from most to least important, based on your experience.**



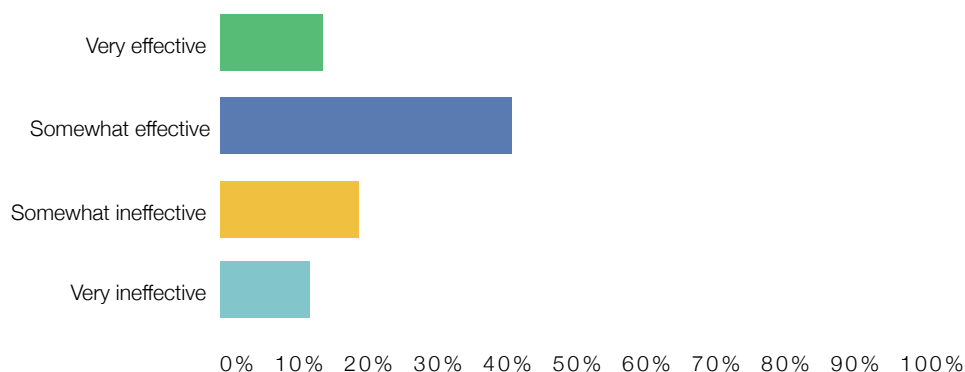
**(Note: chart shows average responses for each area, with 10 being the most important and 1 being least important)**

**Q11 What are your views on how effectively the council draws people into its work through events and participation? For example, Community Assemblies and their Working Groups, the People’s Budget forums, Tenants’ and Residents’ Forums, Transport and Parking Forums.**

**What do you think should happen with regard to the Mayoral model?**



## Appendices



| ANSWER CHOICES  | RESPONSES |           |
|---|-----------|-----------|
| No change: systems work well as they are  | 10.71%    | 3         |
| Keep the Mayoral model, but attempt to build in different ways of working to share responsibility to decision making                            | 32.14%    | 9         |
| Move to the Leader/Cabinet model (where there is no directly elected Mayor, and instead a leader elected by all councillors appoints a Cabinet) | 14.29%    | 4         |
| Move to the committee system (where instead of a Cabinet, councillors sitting on a number of committees make decisions)                         | 7.14%     | 2         |
| Adopt a form of hybrid arrangement which might involve combining some of the features of the above models                                       | 21.43%    | 6         |
| No settled view on the subject  | 10.71%    | 3         |
| <b>Total</b>  |           | <b>28</b> |

### Additional responses to this question:

It depends. If there is a good Mayor the Mayoral system is quite effective. The Committee system was excellent in letting local Councillors participate with in local decisions but very slow. It depends.

Elected mayoral model gives too much power to one person who may have too many failings and grudges to be a balanced impartial leader

Good that Mayor is selected by a group wider than Councillors. However the structure doesn't encourage the Mayor to be collegiate and work with Councillors because they are secure for four years. Not sure what the answer is. I don't favour the leader model as it's not clear to me that Councillors are better at electing good leaders - ie Chairs of scrutiny etc

There are pros and cons to all forms. I directly elected mayoral model works well if there is an opposition, but as we don't

have that any for of leadership must have sufficient checks and balances to ensure we aren't corrupt or abusing power.

I don't have a settled view. I don't think the current system works. To be completely honest I don't think the committee system would work. Some councillors have full time jobs and how do you attract people to want to be cllrs with a system like that.

The current Mayor operates under a much more collegiate model with shared responsibility amongst the cabinet and wider executive. This is a marked improvement from the previous Mayor who solely made all decisions

Devolve some of the local operational prioritise to be determined locally and delivered through localised organisational arrangements - Neighbourhood committees

Abolish the elected mayor, or keep it under the proviso that any incumbent can only hold office for a maximum of two

## Appendices

terms. Half of cabinet appointed by the mayor (if kept) the rest elected to cabinet. Lead members to sit and chair committees or working groups where their service and directorate policy is shaped by other councillors a maximum of five councillors per working group. This will build more ownership of directorate and council decisions and policy among backbenchers. The mayoralty if kept as a two term seat should rotate between a man and a woman at the end of each incumbents two terms. Racial and ethnic considerations should also be taken into account of selecting a person to be mayor. There should also be a limit on the extent of the mayor or leaders powers with the ability to appoint to or fire from cabinet, set the political direction and be leader of group but all delegated authority should be mandatory and only a vote by majority should give the incumbent full executive power and not more than a period of six months with a six month break before an application and full council vote can give full executive authority to an incumbent leader/Mayor with a maximum of five the times this power can be used in a 2 two period. Backbench councillors should be able to submit an application to sit on a directorate/ cabinet member working group (mentioned above) and should reapply every calendar year which allows other councillors to apply to different working groups to broaden their skills base, develop and contribute to a broad range political and council priorities. The leader/mayor should be able to

appoint at least two non-councillors to the executive but not as full cabinet members. These appointments will manage a particular stream of work and before appointment will be subject to an appointments panel of councillors which would not include the leader/mayor but made up of at least two members of the executive, two chairs of scrutiny, an officer from member services and another from HR. These external appointments will be appointed for one year with an option of a 12 month extension subject to the recommendations of another appointments panel. Their remuneration will be that of a commissioner or deputy cabinet member.

The change of Mayor has demonstrated there is more than one way of experiencing the Mayoral model, but the legacy of the last regime is a bad hangover and more needs to change.

I do feel we need someone who is more obviously in a ceremonial role

The Mayoral model helps with accountability yet also has problems with a lack of transparency of decision making and holding the Mayor to account between elections.

More important to limit Mayoralty to 2 terms and allow more power to cabinet members round portfolio areas

### Is there anything that might change your view?

| ANSWER CHOICES  | RESPONSES |           |
|---|-----------|-----------|
| Views expressed by party members  | 34.62%    | 9         |
| Views expressed by fellow councillors                                     | 34.62%    | 9         |
| Views expressed by people in the local community                          | 57.69%    | 15        |
| Recommendations and conclusions reached by the Democracy Commission       | 65.38%    | 17        |
| Understanding more about other councils which have considered this issues | 65.38%    | 17        |
| Understanding more from national research on this topic                   | 50.0%     | 13        |
| Other (please specify)  | 3.85%     | 1         |
| <b>Total Respondents:</b>   |           | <b>26</b> |

#### “Other” response:

“Review and study of international local governance structures, which have shown positive outcomes for the involvement of local people and elected members in the governance of their local institutions and promotion of democracy principles including accountability, transparency and wide participation.”

